



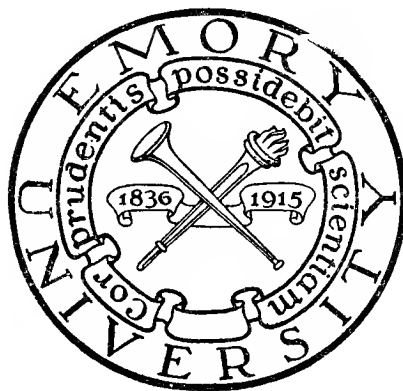
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# CONSTANCE

BY F. C. PHILIPS



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CONSTANCE.



# CONSTANCE

A Novel

BY

F. C. PHILIPS

AUTHOR OF

"AS IN A LOOKING GLASS," Etc

*NEW EDITION*

London

WARD & DOWNEY LTD

12 YORK BUILDINGS ADELPHI W.C

1894.

PRINTED BY  
KELLY AND CO. LIMITED, 182, 183 AND 184, HIGH HOLBORN, W.C.  
AND KINGSTON-ON-THAMES.

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CONSTANCE



# CONSTANCE.



## CHAPTER I.

MRS. ARMITAGE stood in the porch of Grey-stone Park gazing at the retreating forms of her husband and his friends, as, equipped in their shooting costumes, and followed at a distance by two keepers, they started on their day's sport. The party consisted of Mr. Armitage, his great ally, Lord Hardstock—a man who for many years had lived on his title and his wits, but who lately had come into a large fortune—and Basil St. Quentin, an attaché at the English Embassy in Paris. As they walked leisurely down the avenue, the two guests occasionally looked back and received a smile or a wave of the hand from their hostess. But Cyril Armitage never once turned his head, nor indeed seemed conscious that there was such a person in existence as his wife.

When once the sportsmen were out of sight, Mrs. Armitage turned with a sigh

and entered the house. Her life was a very unhappy one now, although when she had married, nine years ago, everything promised a bright and happy future for her. Cyril Armitage was rich, and of good family, and appeared to be desperately in love with her. The marriage was, apparently, not only one of affection, but it was also considered by all the friends of the contracting parties to be eminently satisfactory from every possible point of view. Two children had been born of their union, a boy and a girl, and for the first few years everything went well. But then Mr. Armitage unfortunately began to drink more than was good for him, and, truth to tell, there were few nights when he went to bed sober. Acting under the influence of this detestable habit, he became unreasonably jealous of his wife, and there would often be violent scenes between them, for, needless to say, Constance Armitage indignantly resented her husband's most unjust suspicions. Later on—as is often the case with dipsomaniacs—the unhappy man took a dislike to society, and so it was that he gave up his house in London and retired permanently to his place in Norfolk. Mrs. Armitage was not sorry for this. Indeed, under the circumstances, she preferred a country life. The poor lady was devoted

to her children, and the loss of London society in no way affected her. Occasionally, as at the present time, her husband would ask two or three men for a few days' shooting, but she saw little of the friends thus invited. In the first place they were out nearly all day, and soon after dinner they would retire to the billiard-room, and would be seen no more until the next morning.

Lord Hardstock was a bosom friend of her husband, although in every respect a contrast to him. Armitage, since he had taken to drink, was taciturn, and, as a rule, very ill-tempered. Now Lord Hardstock, on the other hand, was a brilliant conversationalist, a man who took all trouble lightly and carelessly, and whose idea of the world seemed to be that it had been created purely for his amusement, and that, at any rate, it was his duty to derive every possible enjoyment from it.

Basil St. Quentin was also an old friend of Armitage's. He had known and admired Mrs. Armitage before her marriage, and now pitied her for the terrible life she was compelled to lead. Cyril Armitage was at no pains to conceal the fact that the love he once had for his wife was dead, and his rudeness to her in the presence of his guests often made the blood mount



hotly to St. Quentin's cheeks, and he longed to give the husband the chastisement he deserved.

There were times indeed when Constance felt that things must come to an end, when the brutality and coarse insolence of her husband proved almost beyond her endurance. But what could she do? Although it was impossible for her to entertain any feelings of affection, or even respect, for her husband, she fancied, somehow, that if she left him the wrong would be on her side, and that she might not only forfeit the world's good opinion, but would run the risk of being separated from her children. And her children, being everything to her, came before all else.

And now to make matters worse—and, Heaven knows, they were bad enough already—Lord Hardstock had lately begun to pay her an amount of attention that was not only odious to her on account of her dislike to the man himself, but because her husband had such implicit faith in him that he appeared to be—and indeed was—perfectly unconscious of his friend's treachery. It amused Lord Hardstock to see the anger produced by his civil speeches. Good looking, and accustomed as he was to very easy conquests, it was a

novel sensation for him to meet with the chilling indifference of Mrs. Armitage.

Later on, to-day, when Constance was tired of brooding over her troubles, she went for a brisk walk across the park, and, as ill luck would have it, was much against her own inclination forced into a *tête-à-tête* interview with Lord Hardstock—the man whom she so much disliked. She came upon him suddenly and gave a start of surprise, being quite unprepared for meeting anyone in the secluded path she had chosen.

“You frightened me,” she said recovering herself. “I did not expect to meet anyone here. Where are the others?”

“I am lost,” he said, with a laugh, “or, rather, I lost myself. I got tired of killing inoffensive pheasants which had never done me any harm, so, like a naughty child, I lagged behind; but I don’t regret it, for, since I have lost myself, at any rate I have found you.”

“I was just going to turn homewards,” she said coldly.

“Then we can walk together,” he replied.

“Had you not better wait for the others?” she asked. “Where have you been shooting?”

“Here, there, and everywhere,” was the

answer. "No, I would rather walk back with you, if you will let me. Have you been very dull all day?"

"No," she said, "I am never dull."

"And yet you see no society, and your life must be very monotonous."

"I have plenty of occupations—my children, and the people in the village."

"Oh, yes. The mothers' meetings and the penny readings! It must all be very delightful, I have no doubt. But, surely, a woman like you was never created for such an existence?"

"You must be wrong there," she answered, "since it is my fate to follow it."

"You bear it very bravely," said Lord Hardstock, adopting a more sentimental tone, "but I am sure you are not happy."

"Let us talk of something else," she said, abruptly. "I am not an interesting subject to discuss."

"You are very interesting to me," said he. "I would rather talk about you than anything or anybody on earth, or in Heaven for the matter of that."

Mrs. Armitage burst out laughing, a laugh that was perfectly natural and unfeigned, and it was more galling to Lord Hardstock than any reproof that could have come from her lips.

"I had no idea I was so absorbing," she

said. "And, really, you looked so genuine when you said it."

"I was genuine," he answered. "I always am when I talk to you. I want you to tell me one thing."

"What is that?" asked Mrs. Armitage.

"I want you to tell me why you are not happy."

"When I require a confidant perhaps I will," said she, "but at present, as you seem so bent on discussing me, I should advise you to do so with my husband."

Lord Hardstock pursed up his lips, and for the moment made no reply. Presently he said: "How long is St. Quentin going to stay here?"

"I don't know," replied Mrs. Armitage. "As you are doubtless aware, my husband fixes the stay of the friends he asks."

"But St. Quentin is a friend of yours; is he not?"

"Yes, I have known him a long time," she said, colouring in spite of herself. "But I didn't ask him here."

"Did you suggest to Armitage that he should do so?" asked Lord Hardstock.

"That is rather a curious question for you to put to me," she answered, "but I will reply to it all the same. Mr.

Armitage asked Mr. St. Quentin here himself."

"I wonder what his reason was?" said his lordship.

"His reason was, because he occasionally likes to hear what is going on in Paris. Although we live out of the world, we have not ceased taking an interest in it."

"You might be one of the brightest ornaments of that world," he exclaimed, after a pause.

"You are in a complimentary humour," she replied, smiling. "I am so unused to compliments that I never know what to say when one is paid to me."

"Does St. Quentin never pay you compliments?" he asked.

"No, he is too well bred," she answered, and the minute afterwards was angry with herself for losing her temper.

"I know that he is a pattern of all the virtues," said Lord Hardstock, "but for my part I hate a paragon. I always suspect the cloven foot."

To this remark Mrs. Armitage did not vouchsafe any answer. She was angry with Lord Hardstock for his insinuations respecting St. Quentin, and still more vexed that she should have shown she minded them. All she longed for was

that the *tête-à-tête* should come to an end. Hardstock walked by her side with his eyes cast upon the ground, and evidently in anything but good humour. Presently he looked up and said :

“I had often longed for a walk with you alone, and yet I have not enjoyed this one.”

“Anticipation is always better than realisation,” said Mrs. Armitage, drily.

“I don’t see why you should always be so down on me,” he continued. “It is very hard to be always snubbed.”

“Then you should not make remarks that require snubbing,” she answered.

“You never snub St. Quentin.”

“I treat people as they treat me ; Mr. St. Quentin has never said an impertinent word to me in his life.”

“Because he does not care for you as I do. You know that I——”

“That is enough, Lord Hardstock,” said Mrs. Armitage, colouring. “I will not listen to such nonsense. You are my husband’s friend, and, therefore, I do not wish to quarrel with you, but once for all, there must be an end of the tone you have adopted lately. If you cannot speak to me with proper respect, I shall be reluctantly obliged to ask my husband to shorten your stay.”



"I beg your pardon if I have offended you," he said.

"Your words and your manner would offend any woman who had the least atom of self-respect," she answered.

They were now approaching the house, and Mrs. Armitage felt untold relief as she saw in the distance her children coming forward to meet her.

"Here come the children," she said, with a joy she could not repress.

"Are we to be enemies?" asked Lord Hardstock, somewhat sulkily.

"I don't know what you mean," she answered.

"You will know one day," he said.

But Constance scarcely heard him, as the children ran up to her and poured into their mother's ear a voluble account of their day's proceedings.

## CHAPTER II.

THE dinner that evening was particularly gloomy and depressing. In the first place, Mr. Armitage was in a vile humour and found fault with everything. Then, too, he had already had a great deal too much to drink, as was evidenced by his purple face and bloodshot eyes. His wife bore his complaints with that patience which long custom had taught her to acquire. Only occasionally, when he emphasised his remarks by an oath, did her face assume a look as if that patience had come to an end.

Lord Hardstock, for once, was silent, making no attempt to improve matters, while St. Quentin made desperate efforts to talk to Mrs. Armitage, and to appear to ignore the temper of her husband. When, at length, the dinner came to an end, Constance withdrew to the drawing-room, thankful to be alone, and with her cheeks still burning at the language Mr. Armitage had used in her presence. She took up a book and tried to read, but her thoughts wandered away to the time when she had

first known her husband. What a change had taken place! Was it possible that the man who had once loved her so ardently could now insult her in the presence of his friends? She threw down the book, and rising from her chair paced up and down the room; and, as her thoughts again recurred to the open contempt her husband displayed for her, the tears came into her eyes, and she scarcely made any effort to restrain them. She could bear it no longer. No woman would put up with such treatment. She must have an explanation with him, and some arrangement must be made by which they could live apart. Then, as always, arose the question of the children. What would become of them? They might be sent to school—at least the boy, Arthur, who was then eight, and the girl, Eva, could remain with her. Surely her husband could not object to a separation? He had not retained the faintest semblance of affection for her, and, if he wished it, the children could spend a portion of their holidays with him.

These thoughts occurred rapidly to her, and, acting upon the spur of the moment, she rang the bell and sent word to Mr. Armitage by the servant who answered her summons that she wished to speak to

him. Yes, she would no longer endure this life, and she would let her husband know at once what she had decided. She waited a few minutes. Then, instead of her husband, Basil St. Quentin entered the room.

"Your husband is playing a match with Lord Hardstock," he said. "Do you particularly wish to see him? He has sent me in his place."

"It is of no consequence," she answered with a feeling of disappointment at the interview being delayed. "I will wait until they have finished the game."

"You were crying," he said. "Has anything happened?"

"Nothing unusual has happened," she answered. "You heard what took place at dinner—it is only a sample of my everyday life. But I have borne it long enough; I will bear it no longer. I had sent for Mr. Armitage to tell him as much."

"I am very sorry indeed for you," he said. "Armitage is violent and unreasonable. But what do you propose doing?"

"I mean to leave him," she answered. "If it were not for my children, I would leave the house to-night."

"You must not do anything rash," he said. "One false step and you would be irretrievably ruined." And then he added,

"I cannot tell you how grieved I am for you."

"Yes, I have paid dearly for making what the world calls a brilliant match, have I not?" she said bitterly "But it is at an end now. I want none of his money. I will only accept what is sufficient to educate my children."

"I am afraid Lord Hardstock is not a friend of yours," said Mr. St. Quentin; "and if I were you I should wait until he is gone before I did anything. From what I have noticed he seems to encourage your husband in his conduct towards you."

"I know he is not my friend," she said, "and I am very glad of it. I fear that he is a man who is a stranger to all honourable feelings."

"He has made one or two very disagreeable remarks to me," said St. Quentin, "but I have not noticed them, as it appears there is enough strife in the house already, and I really believe that his malicious insinuations to your husband were the cause of the outbreak at dinner."

"What do you mean?" asked Constance.

"I mean that he is base enough to suggest to Armitage that the affection which he knows I bore for you before your marriage has not entirely disappeared."

And then Constance remembered Lord Hardstock's innuendos of the afternoon, and his parting remark that she would know one day what it meant for him to be her enemy. She did not, however, mention this. If Lord Hardstock maligned her, and her husband listened to him, there was all the more reason for an instant separation.

"I see what you mean," said she, "and it only strengthens me in my resolution." And then she added: "I should be very sorry if you were in any way mixed up in our unfortunate quarrels. You had better leave at once."

"I had intended doing so to-morrow," he answered, "and had availed myself of the old plan of having a telegram sent me. It will arrive to-morrow morning."

"Then I had better delay the announcement of my departure until you have gone. Perhaps it is well ordered that you should have come and told me this before I acted too precipitately."

"I can understand that your life is intolerable," he said, "and I really see nothing for you but a separation."

"No, it is inevitable," she answered. "I have often thought about it before, and then for one reason or another have relinquished the idea; but this time I have

quite made up my mind, and nothing shall shake my resolution."

"You may always count upon me as your friend," he said. "If ever you are in trouble write to me at the Embassy, and I will do all in my power to help you."

"Thank you," she answered, holding out her hand to him in friendship.

He took it and raised it to his lips, and at that moment Armitage and Lord Hardstock entered the room.

"You make a very pretty picture!" cried the infuriated husband. "Have you nearly done with my wife, St. Quentin?"

Both remained silent. The action had been innocent, but the interruption was so sudden that neither of them had a word to say. It was Lord Hardstock who first broke silence.

"St. Quentin is only wishing your wife 'good-night,'" said he, with a curious expression in his face that culminated in a smile almost Satanic in its way.

"He chooses a —— funny way of doing so," said Armitage. And then, turning to his wife, he continued: "You had better go to your room, madam. If you cannot behave yourself with decency in my absence you shall at any rate not disgrace me before my guests."

Now this was too much for Constance.

The feeling of indignation against her husband, which she had only partially smothered owing to St. Quentin's words, burst forth again with ten-fold violence, and, quite unable to control herself, she said :

"I will pass by your insulting suspicions, because they are too ridiculous to be answered ; but, as you order me to go to my room, I may as well tell you that it is my intention to leave you altogether. You dare to talk of my disgracing you ! I have never done so, as you well know. For the past six years I have borne your insults and calumnies, until I can bear them no longer. Your guests have been witness of what I have endured, and I had just told Mr. St. Quentin of my determination to leave you when you entered the room."

"And pray, does Mr. St. Quentin accompany you ?" asked her husband.

"You have no right to make such an insinuation," said St. Quentin hotly. "I am leaving here to-morrow morning, and it is because I do not choose to stay in the house of a man who is lost to all self-respect and gentleman-like feeling."

"By —— you shall both leave the house to-night," roared Armitage, mad with passion. "I must have been blind all this time not to have seen what was going on



between you under my very nose ; but I am blind no longer. You can pack up your traps and be off—the pair of you—and a good riddance of bad rubbish !”

“You do not know what you are saying,” said St. Quentin quietly. “When you are sober, you will regret your infamous accusation.”

“Armitage was sober enough to see you kissing his wife,” said Lord Hardstock, carelessly. “You must admit, St. Quentin, that it was not a very pleasant sight for him.”

“No, it was a —— unpleasant one,” said the master of the house. “But they can do their billing and cooing elsewhere in future ; they don’t stop another night in this house.”

Then Constance walked up to her husband and said very calmly and quietly : “It was not my intention to attempt to exonerate myself, but, as you appear to be serious, I must do so. I had just told Mr St. Quentin that my life was intolerable, and that I intended to leave you ; and he, in return, had said that he would always be my friend. On my honour, that is all that passed between us. At that moment you came in.”

“I have no doubt that his friendship will be very valuable,” said Lord Hardstock.

"At any rate you shall not enjoy it in my house," said Armitage. "I have told you both to go, and I have nothing more to say."

"I shall choose my own time for leaving your house," said Constance, proudly, "and I refuse to obey the orders of a drunken man."

"You will soon see if I am drunk, and if I am not master in my own house," cried her husband. Then turning to Lord Hardstock, he said: "Just ring the bell, there's a good fellow, will you?"

The summons was immediately answered. A crowd of servants, attracted by the noise, had clustered round the door—as servants will do on such unpleasant occasions—and the butler, wearing a look of excessive innocence, and without betraying in the least degree that he imagined that anything was wrong, at once appeared.

"Tell Pratt to pack up Mrs. Armitage's things, and William is to do the same for Mr. St. Quentin," said Armitage. "They are both leaving here to-night, and the brougham must be at the door in half an hour."

The butler withdrew, and Constance, with flaming cheeks, bursts forth: "How dare you so insult me before the servants? Lord Hardstock, speak to him. He may listen to you. Tell him that he is wrong; that I am innocent."

"It is always a bad plan to interfere between husband and wife," said his lordship, with a smile. "I have no doubt when the time comes you will be able to exculpate yourself."

"You need not appeal to Lord Hardstock," said Mr. St. Quentin; "he is scarcely the person to give anyone good advice. You must obey your husband, even though he is not sober. I will escort you to London. Once there, you can take the necessary steps to have your separation legally carried out."

"There's no question of a separation," said Armitage. "It shall be a divorce." Then turning to his wife he continued; "And —— glad I shall be to get rid of you and your tragedy-queen airs."

"I will take your advice, Mr. St. Quentin," said Constance, paying no attention to her husband's last outburst; and, so saying, she went out of the room.

The poor lady's nerves had been so shaken by the infamous scene that she had scarcely strength to climb the staircase. But somehow or other she managed to do it and went straight to her children's bedrooms and kissed them both, as they lay asleep all unconscious of their mother's trouble. In less than half an hour she had left the house.

### CHAPTER III.

FROM Greystone Park to the station was not a long drive, and Mrs. Armitage and her companion managed to catch the last train to London.

"We had better not go up to town in the same carriage," said Mr. St. Quentin. "There is no saying what enormity Armitage may be guilty of with that ruffian Hardstock at his elbow, and it is best to be prepared for everything." Mrs. Armitage agreed, and consequently saw no more of Basil until the train steamed into Liverpool Street.

"I will call and see you to-morrow, if you will allow me," said Basil, as he put Constance into a hansom.

"Of course. I am going to old Mr. Bolder, my people's lawyer, the first thing in the morning—or rather as soon as I am dressed, for it's morning now—and after that I have nothing to do. Will you come and lunch at the Metropole? That's where I shall stay if I can find rooms."

"No, I think that would be unwise under all the circumstances, and considering the kind of people that you will have

to fight. And the fight is certain, rest assured of that."

"Well, perhaps you are right," said Constance, wearily. "Anyhow, tell me when I may hope to see you."

"I will call in the afternoon about four, if that will suit you."

"Perfectly," answered Constance. "Very well, then, I shall expect you at four. Tell the man, will you, to drive to the Metropole? Good-bye."

Basil St. Quentin's feelings as he sat smoking in his chambers previous to turning in were of a mixed character. In the first place he was exceedingly sorry for and deeply pained at the unmerited misfortune that had overtaken the only woman for whom he had ever really cared. But there is a good deal of human nature in man, and he could not fail to find pleasure in the reflection that Constance and her husband were doubtless now estranged for ever, and that should Mrs. Armitage succeed in obtaining a divorce, he, Basil, would have an excellent chance of making her his wife.

Constance Armitage found rooms at the Metropole, but, although sorely in need of rest, she was unable to close her eyes during the remainder of the night. She rose early, and was one of the first callers

at Messrs. Bolder, Tanfield, Willicombe and Sharpe's, the great firm of solicitors in Bedford Row, and she asked for Mr. Bolder, the senior partner.

Old Mr. Bolder received her in his most courteous manner, heard her story, shook his head now and again with a gravity worthy of a Burleigh, and finally said, "My dear madam, I need scarcely tell you that I will devote my whole energies to your interests, which, after all, are simple. You need have no anxiety, as your settlements were drawn in this office. For the present, I am satisfied that you want other help than I can give you. Let me beg you without delay to consult your doctor. I can clearly see—and you must be guided by me, for you are young enough to be my daughter—that you need rest."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Bolder. I will do as you suggest."

"That is right. Let me see you in three days' time—say Friday at eleven."

And then, to the surprise of his staff of clerks, the old man took Mrs. Armitage down the stairs on his arm, handed her into her hansom, and returned with a thoughtful face.

"Tell Mr. Jackson," he said as he re-entered, "to bring up Mrs. Armitage's

boxes and all papers of any sort connected with her affairs, and run round to our junior, Mr. Brayson, in Old Square, and fix a consultation for this evening after six. See the cashier, and take a cheque for counsel's fee and clerk's."

And then the old man returned to a mass of plans showing sections of a mine in Wales, into which some water had broken from a disused mine, and drowned all the men who were actually at work. The death of the men was a mere incident. Five-and-twenty pounds a-head would probably cover everything, even in these Radical days, when the law actually gives compensation to workmen who are butchered through the negligence of their employer or his representative. But the stoppage of the works was another matter, for they formed the principal security in several heavy family settlements. It was a bone with plenty of meat upon it, and the old lawyer returned to his task of worrying it with a relish.

Mrs. Armitage, acting on Mr. Bolder's advice, drove immediately to Dr. Jacob Chatwin's. Now Dr. Chatwin was a physician as kindly in nature as he was eminent in his profession. The doctor had known the poor lady ever since she was three years old, and was naturally much

grieved at the state in which he found her. Her nerves were strung to the highest pitch and she was trembling with excitement.

"My dear child," said the doctor, patting Constance on the head as he used to do when she was a little girl in short frocks. "My dear child, your trouble is a mental one, not a physical one. Now sit down and tell me all about it."

Mrs. Armitage obeyed, and in a few minutes Dr. Chatwin knew the history of her unhappy married life.

"Now the first thing that I must tell you, Mrs. Armitage, is that you must not worry. I absolutely forbid it. Why, a good man is not worth worrying about, and as for a man like your husband, he is unworthy of a second consideration. The only thing to be decided—and that is a matter for your lawyers to attend to—is the best way to get rid of him. Life with a man of that description is a living death, and no woman should be called upon to support such an existence. I have an only daughter, as you know, and I tell you what it is, Mrs. Armitage, I would rather see my child in her coffin than that she should be doomed to pass the remainder of her life with a jealous, drunken man."

"I think you are quite right, Dr.



Chatwin," said Constance. "Anyhow, I am to see Mr. Bolder again on Friday, and he will, of course, do all that is necessary. I feel I am quite safe in acting under his advice."

"Perfectly safe," said Dr. Chatwin, who had begun to write out a prescription. "I have known Mr. Bolder for forty years, and a more thorough man of the world I never met. Now you have this made up at once," handing the slip of paper to his patient, "and take it regularly till you see me again. You will find that it will put a little new life into you. If you don't feel better send for me or come here without delay. You know my hours—eleven to one and after five. Good-bye. Cheer up, and, above all, don't worry."

Mrs. Armitage made her way back to the Metropole and ordered lunch, but could scarcely eat a morsel when it came upon the table. Then she took up a book and tried to while away the time until Mr. St. Quentin should put in an appearance. She found it, however, quite impossible to concentrate her ideas, so she threw down the book and began to think. Her reflections, it need hardly be stated, were not of a very pleasant character. For the last three years, at all events, no ray of happiness had come into her life, excepting such as

was derived from the companionship of her children. They, indeed, were her only solace and now it was proposed to deprive her of their tender love. But the law could never allow this infamy to be perpetrated. Mr. Bolder would take care of that. She longed for Friday to come in order that she might learn what steps the old lawyer was taking and spur him on, if need be, to fresh exertions. Whatever it might cost, both in trouble and money, she made up her mind to regain possession of the little ones. No tigress robbed of her whelps could have been more desperate, more determined.

While Constance was pondering over these things, the door opened and Basil St. Quentin was shown in. His face was very grave and he was evidently the bearer of intelligence of very serious import. He went up to her and shook hands.

"I have brought you terrible news—very terrible news indeed—Mrs. Armitage," he said, pointing to a newspaper which he laid on the table. "Your husband is dead."

Mrs. Armitage sank down in a chair but spoke no word.

"It seems he had an apoplectic fit. But perhaps I had better read you what the paper says. It is only a short para-

graph:—"Mr. Cyril Armitage, of Greystone Park, Norfolk, died suddenly this morning of apoplexy. The deceased gentleman, who was apparently in perfect health, shot yesterday with a party of friends whom he had been entertaining at Greystone. Mr. Armitage was in his thirtieth year and leaves a wife and two children."

Then Mrs. Armitage spoke for the first time and her voice was almost unnaturally calm. "My course is clear," said she. "I shall leave for Greystone at once."

"Yes, that will doubtless be the best. Can I be of any assistance?"

"No, thank you very much. I think not. And now, Mr. St. Quentin, you won't be angry if I tell you that I would rather be alone for a little time. You won't think me unkind if I say good-bye?"

"Of course not. Good - bye, Mrs. Armitage. I need scarcely beg you to command me, if there is anything I can possibly do."

Mrs. Armitage made no reply, but shook hands rather coldly, at least so St. Quentin thought as he left the room.

The door had no sooner closed than Constance burst into tears.

## CHAPTER 1V.

WITH the exception of an elder sister, and apart from her own children, Constance Armitage did not possess a single near relation. She had lost her mother during her infancy, and her father, a famous judge, had died a few months before her marriage with Cyril Armitage. Indeed it may be doubted whether Sir Henry Fabian, a very shrewd and far-seeing man, would ever have given his consent to marriage. But, as we have seen, Constance was an orphan at the time, with no one to advise her except her sister Rebecca, and that young lady (herself already married to the eminent Queen's Counsel, Mr. Strangways), being strongly in favour of the match, and Constance being desperately in love, the marriage had accordingly taken place.

Mr. Justice Fabian was fifty-two when he was made a judge, and everybody said it was a capital appointment. He had made a brilliant success at the Bar, and had saved a good deal of money. This was perhaps fortunate, as of course, his income dropped suddenly by some few thousands a year. He had found his work at the Bar monotonous and tiring. He

found his work now more monotonous and tiring than ever. He had to sit in chambers and to decide points that were the very ABC of litigation. He had to sit in court and keep counsel in order, and preserve his own dignity, and preserve his own temper over disputes that were as devoid of all human interest as is a fossil of life. He felt as if he were a successful general sent with half-a-dozen battalions, three regiments of light cavalry, and a battery of artillery to capture a farmhouse which the farm-labourers were holding with their pitch-forks; or an explorer who, on returning from Thibet, or the Amazons, or Equatorial Africa, is told off for two years to take soundings in the Serpentine, and report the peculiarities of its bottom; or a Senior Wrangler who has to hear, day after day, a more than usually dull fourth form stumble through the Second Book of Euclid. He had none of the pleasure out of life that other men had had. His time had never been his own. He had been to Paris once or twice, and to Mentone, and to Rome, in much the same mechanical way as he had been to Brighton and to Scarborough. But all his real tastes and wishes had remained unfulfilled, and had died out of him. From the "wild joy of living" he had been utterly cut off. Of hunting,

of shooting, of yachting, he could have told nothing. When he went down to the House of Commons he was always too tired to do more than vote steadily with his party, and now and again make a solid speech of fifteen minutes. He had never seen the Southern Sea break over a coral reef; he had never sat under the shade of palm trees, nor seen the big game fall to his own rifle. He might have been behind a counter selling calico by the yard and butter by the pound, for all the real enjoyment that life yielded to him.

Mr. Justice Fabian found himself one judge among many. He was not quite so self-assertive as were some of his legal colleagues. The daily papers occasionally took him to task. The Court of Appeal put him right vexatiously over trumpery matters of detail. The Attorney-General, whom he could remember as a junior at the Middlesex Sessions with a keen eye to dock defences, and at the Mayor's Court, where he devilled for one of the leaders, was very frequently impertinent to him. It was a positive relief to him when long vacation came and he could go down to Essex and stroll about his estate and look at his ducks and cattle and watch the progress of his trees and jolt about the roads on his weight-carrying cob.

The brightest and most cheerful time of Sir Henry's life were his school and college days, when he got the medal for Latin verse and the pewter pot for the quarter-mile swimming-race, and the scholarship at Oxford, and when he took his first-class in Moderation, and played in the College eleven, and took his first-class in Greats, and entered at the Inner Temple, and got his fellowship at Balliol. Then came the drudgery of a pleader's chambers, with their interminable shelves of reports. Then he went sessions and circuit, and used to defend prisoners who had stolen eggs, or won money by the confidence trick, or mistaken someone else's house for their own, or broken the ribs of a county constable. Then came London business with its pickings—a brougham smashed up by an omnibus; a money-lender who had exceeded his powers under a bill of sale; the cook who sued the licensed victualler for breach of promise of marriage; the suburban householder who had got into a row with a jobbing builder over qualities and quantities; the butcher whose account had been disputed. It had been all practice, of course. But how miserable and dull and flat and unprofitable it all was! It paid, however, and young Mr. Fabian found himself making seven

hundred a year, and able to give up his fellowship and marry Miss Edith Bumble, daughter of the second partner of Cobb, Dobbs, Bumble, Davis, Quicksetter and Sharp, of Old Jewry (Cobb had been dead for twenty years, but the name still brought clients). Miss Edith Bumble was not exactly intelligent, nor altogether sympathetic. But the young barrister's income leaped from seven hundred a year to a handsome total in four figures, and by the time he was forty he had taken silk.

To do him justice he had been a sound lawyer and had deserved the success which had come to him in this somewhat round-about way. He had a clear head. He knew his case law. He could write a clear and sensible opinion. He could address a jury in lucid and ordinary English. He could talk over an arbitrator, and he could now and again teach the judges in banc their business. No one doubted his ability, or his energy, or his straightforwardness and courage. Nobody was astonished when he moved from Curzon Street to Prince's Gate, when Mrs. Fabian took to a two-horse Victoria, or when he became member for the immaculate borough of Great Kiddington, or when his portrait was hung in the Royal Academy, or when he bought himself a little estate in Essex.



And yet, how dull his life had been! Consultations at nine; robing-room at ten; court at 10-30. Jury case before Mr. Baron Blunderstone in which he signally defeats Proser, Q.C. Then lunch—sandwiches and some sherry from his flask. Then an argument in banc in which—in his turn—he is utterly routed by Mr. Serjeant Jawkins, whose masterly exposition of the law with regard to ancient wells elicits compliments from the Bench and produces a profound article in the *Times* next morning. Then chambers, dusty and dirty, with even the Morocco chairs and bookcases looking dingy. Consultation following upon consultation. Then a quick cab to Prince's Gate and a dull dinner; after dinner, briefs and tea and perhaps a cigar until nearly midnight. And next morning the robing-room again.

There was a pleasant side to the picture. The guineas rolled in. The bankers' account took care of itself. The senior clerk wore a thick gold chain. But it was a terrible treadmill. No time to dine out. No time to read even the papers, much less current books; hardly time to keep posted up in the law reports.

Sir Henry was getting perilously near sixty, and had begun to calculate that there only remained seven years more of

drudgery before he could retire on a well-earned pension, when an attack of bronchitis carried him off. Constance, who found herself in possession of £20,000, went to live with her sister, Mrs. Strangways, and in less than a year from the time of her father's death married Mr. Armitage, an old friend and distant connection of her brother-in-law. We have seen what a martyrdom her married life became, and how she suddenly and unexpectedly found herself free.

Within an hour of Basil St. Quentin's departure Constance made her way to her sister's. Mrs. Strangways lived in Clarges Street, and was at home when Mrs. Armitage arrived.

"Good heavens, Constance! What are you doing here?" was her greeting. "I have been telegraphing to you ever since I heard the terrible news. Surely you were with Cyril when——"

"No, I was not."

"Dear me! What do you mean? How strange you look! I hope there is nothing wrong. I mean nothing worse than this catastrophe itself."

"I had better tell you everything, Rebecca." And Constance poured out her sorrow into the not unsympathetic ears of her sister. For Rebecca Strangways,

though a thorough woman of the world, possessed a kind heart, and was deeply attached to her younger sister.

“This is very terrible,” said Mrs. Strangeways, when Constance had finished. “Very terrible indeed. I am sorry you left the house as you did. I know what the world is, and am positive that there will be a scandal about it, especially with that villain Hardstock there to spread some lying report. However, there is clearly only one thing to be done now. You must go back at once, and I will go with you. That is to say, if my husband approves.”

Mr. Strangeways, who that moment returned from the Temple, did approve ; and the two ladies left for Greystone by the night mail.

## CHAPTER V.

It was nearly midnight when the sisters arrived at Greystone Station. They had decided not to go to the Park until the morning, but to pass the night at the Bull Hotel.

Mr. Strangways was entirely opposed to this mode of procedure, and wished his sister-in-law before starting to send a telegram to the butler announcing her arrival. But this Mrs. Armitage would not do, and thus it was not until the following morning that she and Rebecca presented themselves at the Park.

Lord Hardstock met them at the door.

"Pray come in, Mrs. Armitage," he said, as though he were inviting her into his own house. "I cannot tell you how grieved I am at this terrible business, nor can I find words to express how much I feel for you. I am glad you have brought another lady with you."

"This is my sister. Lord Hardstock—Mrs. Strangways," said Constance, introducing Rebecca.

"Oh, yes," said his lordship, bowing, "I noticed the likeness."

“And now, Lord Hardstock, I should like to see my husband, and I wish to be alone.”

“Of course. Let me take you to the room.”

“No, thank you,” said Constance; adding, “I should like to have a few words with you, Lord Hardstock, when I come down.”

“Certainly,” answered his lordship. “I, too, have a good deal to tell you.” And then he conducted Mrs. Strangways to the drawing-room, while Constance went upstairs, and in a few moments, having reverently kissed his cold forehead, was praying by the coffin of the man she once so dearly loved and now felt she loved again.

Mrs. Strangways was a remarkably clever woman, and when Mrs. Strangways made up her mind to carry an object she was, as a rule, entirely successful. Now, Mrs. Strangways’ object at the present time was to pump Lord Hardstock, but in this, it must be owned, she entirely failed. His lordship had made up his mind to commit himself to nothing until after his interview with Mrs. Armitage; so he parried with the dexterity of a Turkish diplomatist all the questions put to him by the crafty Rebecca, with the result that

that lady felt that she knew rather less at the termination of the interview than she did at its commencement.

Presently Constance returned.

"I will leave you, dear, for a little time," said her sister, who clearly saw that Mrs. Armitage and Lord Hardstock both wished to be alone together.

"Thanks, Rebecca. If you will go into the library I will come to you directly."

As soon as they were alone Hardstock turned to Constance and said, "You will find in me a staunch ally if you will only act prudently. I can put everything right for you, and what is more I will do so if we are only friends."

"I do not understand you. But first tell me where are my children? They are not in the nursery "

"Doubtless they are out with the nurse. Anyhow you will see them directly But I have a good deal to say to you at once. I have telegraphed for Cyril's brother and expect him this afternoon. Before his arrival it may be as well that our position towards each other should be clearly defined."

"What do you mean? "

"Simply this. Gerald Armitage will doubtless accept my explanation of the events that have taken place during the

last few days—events which on the face of them appear, to say the least, somewhat curious. Now, if it is to be peace between us, that explanation will be entirely satisfactory. But if it is to be war, why, then you must not be surprised at what may happen.”

“Pray speak more plainly.”

“I cannot speak more plainly. At any rate I have no intention of doing so just at present. Now say which it is to be, peace or war. Peace is always preferable, believe me. War, which brings with it the direst calamities—loss of children for example—ought always to be avoided where it is possible. Oh, you had better not let it be war, Mrs. Armitage.”

A vague idea crossed Constance’s mind that if she did not patch up a truce with this man, she might somehow or other lose her children. For the daughter and sister-in-law of two eminent lawyers she was singularly ignorant of all legal matters, or else she would have been aware that by no process known to the law could she have been deprived of their care. The poor lady felt that she would rather part with life itself than that that should be her lot, and, truth to tell, she would have extended her friendship to a person even viler than Lord Hardstock

rather than be separated from her two treasures. For their sake, and to pass the rest of her life with them, she would have been capable of any sacrifice. At last she said :

“ I cannot see why there should be war between us, Lord Hardstock. I have no ill-feeling towards you, and surely you can have no wish to injure me.”

“ And I see no reason either. I am very glad that we are of the same opinion.” And then, in answer to her inquiries, Lord Hardstock told Constance the details of her husband’s death and explained the preparations he had made for the funeral.

“ When that is over,” said he, “ I shall have something to say to you—something of very great importance.”

“ Cannot you say it now ? ”

“ No, I think not. I do not want to bother you at present. I care for you too well for that.”

His face as he said this was filled with an expression of passion and admiration utterly loathsome to Constance, who felt that she had never hated this man so much as now.

“ I think I will go to my sister,” she said, and rising precipitately left the room.

“ My dearest Constance—my poor girl.”

Mrs. Strangways looked up in the



greatest consternation as her sister flung herself into a chair and covering her face with her hands burst into tears. "You are overwrought," said she, "and I am sure it is not to be wondered at."

But Constance had fairly broken down, and tears and sobs would have their way. The excitement she had gone through and the shock of her husband's death had left her weak and nerveless, and she shrank with a woman's subtle instinct of aversion and terror from the man who, though he had pledged himself to be her friend, in her inmost heart she instinctively recognised as her bitterest enemy.

And yet not even to herself could she reasonably account for her loathing and detestation, and she was more than half inclined to take herself to task for it. And while the tears coursed down Constance's cheeks, Rebecca, hearing the sound of pattering footsteps without, opened the door and in another minute the mother clasped her darlings in her arms, and little by little hope and courage stole back to her heart.

It was late the next evening when Gerald Armitage arrived. Considerably his brother's senior there was hardly a point of resemblance between the two men. Tall, erect, and with a dignified bearing

and slow ponderous manner of speech, Gerald Armitage was apt to impress a stranger with the belief that he was callous and cold-hearted, but Constance was not deceived. The firm grasp of the hands that held her own and the kindly grey eyes bent upon her, told her that here she had a friend, and she turned away with a choking sensation in her throat.

"He must not know," she said to herself. "At all costs the story of the last night of Cyril's life must be kept from his brother."

She turned to look into Lord Hardstock's face. He met her glance significantly, and a blush, as if of shame, suffused her pale cheek.

During the first years of her married life Gerald Armitage had been in India, and beyond an occasional visit at long intervals his sister-in-law had seen little of him. Cyril had never cared much for his brother, whom he used to call a prig and a saintly hypocrite, whereas Gerald was neither one nor the other, though there is little doubt that he would have remonstrated with his brother in the severest manner had he had any idea of his habitual intemperance and the lack of courtesy he displayed towards his unoffending wife. Six months ago he had married an extremely wealthy girl whose acquaintance he had made in

Calcutta, and, strange to say, Constance had never seen her sister-in-law, owing to the inexplicable conduct of her husband, who had forbidden her to write a letter of congratulation to Gerald or his *fiancée*. "Dolt"—"fool"—"idiot" were among the mildest of the choice epithets he bestowed upon Gerald. "My brother was always a fool, and I'm not surprised," her husband used angrily to remark, and Constance had been fairly puzzled to account for his wrath. But she was destined to be enlightened on that point before she was many hours older.

They buried Cyril Armitage in the quiet little churchyard at Greystone, and, despite the troubles of her married life, Constance remembered only that he had been the lover of her youth and the father of her children, and so she mourned for him.

"My dear child," said Rebecca, as she walked into the room where Constance sat in her widow's crape, with her pretty hair hidden by a widow's cap, "my dear child Mr. Willicombe has arrived."

"Why, where is Mr. Bolder?" said Constance, looking startled and not a little disappointed.

Now Mr. Willicombe was the junior partner in the firm, and Constance had

counted on having her old friend Mr. Bolder at her side when the will should be opened and read.

"I understand that Mr. Bolder is confined to his room with gout," answered Rebecca.

Constance sighed impatiently. How desolate she felt, how utterly alone! It seemed to her that there was quite a little crowd in the oak library, when, deadly pale but perfectly calm and composed, she walked straight into their very midst. It was raw and cold and a fire burned cheerily on the tiled hearth; on the mantel-shelf was a statuette in terra-cotta of the master of Greystone, and she shivered as her eyes rested on it. This had been his room, especially his own, and impregnated with his personality. Indeed, only on rare occasions had she ventured there, and now it was hard to realize that he was gone, that never again would she shrink within herself at the sound of his voice, which had power to sting her, and beneath which she cowered as a hound under the lash. She had feared him; she had lived in hourly dread of his violence; but she for the first time realized the full extent of her bondage, now that her bonds had been mercifully cut asunder.

By the big oak table, still littered with

the dead man's papers, stood John Grey, of the firm of Grey, Panting, Leech & Grey, fully alive to the importance attaching to himself as solicitor to the late Mr. Armistage. In a deliberate fashion Mr. Grey proceeded to open the document and spread it out before him.

"This," said he, pompously adjusting his *pince-nez* at a right angle, "is the will of my deceased client. It was drawn up by me some eight years ago, and is, I believe, the only one in existence."

And then followed a string of meaningless words, as it seemed to Constance, hardly one of which she understood. And when the voice ceased and the paper was laid aside, she looked up in blank bewilderment into her brother-in-law's face.

"I am afraid I do not quite understand," she said, apologetically.

"Everything is left unconditionally to you for your lifetime, and to be divided between the children afterwards, and you are made sole executrix," he answered, kindly.

She drew a long breath and rose from her chair. "Thank you," she said, "if you will excuse me I will go to my room."

Mrs. Strangways linked her arm in that of her sister, and a moment later the door

closed upon them. But they were scarcely out of earshot when Lord Hardstock sprang to his feet.

"That will is not worth the paper it is written on," he cried in an aggressive tone. "Cyril Armitage had nothing to leave. Every stick and stone about the place is mortgaged up to the hilt."

"How loudly they are talking!" said Constance, as the buzz of angry voices reached her in her dainty boudoir upholstered in yellow and white with Watteau panels let into the walls, and big, roomy, cushioned lounges that tempted the feminine soul to idleness. "I hope they are not quarrelling."

Before she had time to say more, the library door was flung open, and Lord Hardstock's voice rang out defiantly. "Don't talk to me about documents, Mr. Grey! But since my word is not sufficient for you you shall have them at once, as indeed you must, sooner or later. And again I tell you that Mr. Armitage died an absolute pauper."

## CHAPTER VI.

“REBECCA, what are they saying?” Mrs. Strangways half rose from her seat and then sank back again as the door opened and Gerald Armitage entered the room. He walked up to Constance. “Are you brave enough to hear bad news?” he asked, with infinite gentleness.

Her heart beat so fast that she could hardly speak, but she looked up into his face with a composure she was very far from feeling. “Yes,” said she, “I have gone through so much lately that a little more trouble ought scarcely to affect me.”

“Well,” said he, “the bare facts are these. The trustees under the settlement purchased this estate shortly after your marriage with my poor brother—half the money settled upon you having been used for that purpose. Shortly afterwards one of them, Mr. Penthaligon, died, and the other, Mr. Beamish, as I think most improperly, allowed Cyril to raise a mortgage of £30,000 upon it. Six months ago this mortgage was called in, whereupon I understand my brother applied to Lord

Hardstock for assistance. Well, Lord Hardstock took a transfer mortgage, and advanced a further sum and is now sole mortgagee."

"Lord Hardstock!" she cried. "Am I in his hands?"

Constance's face grew pale and rigid and hard and seemed to age ten years in as many seconds. "Lord Hardstock!" she repeated, mechanically "It is not possible."

"It is a very unpleasant business altogether," said Mr. Armitage. "I was afraid that things were going wrong with Cyril, but I had not the faintest suspicion that such utter ruin was staring him in the face."

"Did Cyril then confide in you as to his losses?" asked Constance.

"Not altogether," he answered, "but I gathered that he was in difficulties."

"He applied to you for money? I suppose, that is what you mean." The light had dawned upon her. This then was the solution of the mystery. This the reason why no word of welcome had greeted Gerald's bride.

In all his life Gerald Armitage never found a task so hard as now when the clear blue eyes seemed to search his inmost soul and compel the truth in all its



nakedness. In halting fashion he told how his brother had written to him, evidently supposing that he had but to ask in order to have, urging his responsibilities as a married man and the father of a family, and appealing to him as a bachelor with neither ties nor encumbrances, and how he, Gerald, had answered him with the somewhat curt intimation of his own approaching marriage, and regretted that it was out of his power to assist him.

"Not a word have I heard from Grey-stone since then," he said, in conclusion.

"And what must you have thought of us all?" cried Constance. "I am sure that you will at least do me the common justice to believe that I never until to-day had the remotest suspicion that we were living beyond our means, nor that Cyril had ever applied to you for assistance."

Mr. Armitage bowed.

"My dear Constance, after all there are your settlements. No one can touch them." Mrs. Strangways tried to glean some comfort from that fact—but this calamity was so unexpected and the mine had been sprung upon them so suddenly that for once in her clever, capable life, she was at a loss.

"I am afraid that £500 a year will not

go far," said Constance. "But I suppose that I must make the best of it."

"But how has the money gone?" asked her sister, who, being of a thrifty, economical turn of mind herself and but little given to spending much on either her own adornment, or pleasure seeking, had been staggered at the extravagance that had come to light.

Constance shook her head. She was ignorant of the first elements of economy, but it was not poverty she feared—neither poverty nor, indeed, privation would have frightened her—it was the knowledge that the man to whom they were indebted was Lord Hardstock that appalled and terrified her. This was but the one drop needed in her cup of shame. But she could not speak of him to Rebecca. The same feeling that sent the hot blood tingling through her cheeks kept her tongue tied. After all, what was there to tell? An idle compliment, a careless, flattering word, such as men like Lord Hardstock scatter broadcast.

Suddenly she came to the resolution that she would see and speak with him—she would make him understand that now she was aware of the true position of affairs she was ready to yield to him what was indeed his, and within a few

minutes she stood facing him, defiant and determined.

"Lord Hardstock," she began, in a voice that, despite her utmost endeavours, would tremble a little, "within the last hour it has come to my knowledge that Greystone belongs to you, and that I and my children are here on sufferance only."

"Constance, are you just or fair?" he asked. "In what way have I sinned? I came to the assistance of an old friend at a time when he sorely needed it, and there the obligation begins and ends. Surely you cannot blame me. I did it for your sake as much as his."

"For my sake!" echoed Mrs. Armitage, drawing herself up haughtily.

"Yes," he replied, "I repeat for your sake. When I was a younger son I went through the mill myself. I have known what it has been to break into the last coin I had in the world, and I swore that that experience should never fall to your lot if I could help it."

"Of course I ought to be grateful."

"I expect no gratitude, nor indeed anything. If you will remain here that is all I ask."

"You must know that is impossible."

"Why?"

“Because I can accept no benefits at your hands.”

“And again I ask why not, Constance?”

“Lord Hardstock, this is the second time you have addressed me by my Christian name. I am Constance only to my friends.”

“And you refuse to count me as one?”

She was silent. The door opened and closed as noiselessly. It was Mr Armitage. Lord Hardstock bent towards her.

“A word from me would have worked terrible mischief in that quarter,” he said, significantly. “I did not speak that word. Do you still feel that you owe me nothing?”

“It is the knowledge of how much I owe you, the magnitude of the debt that is crushing me.” And then she went away, her arms hanging at her side, and her whole attitude one of despair; and as he watched her go he smiled—a cruel smile of triumph.

Two days later Mrs. Armitage left the house where her married life had been spent. Once she had been very happy there. She recalled those early days with a passionate regret that surprised herself, for the misery of the last four years had all but blotted it from memory. But youth

is tenacious and it carried her back now to golden hours when her husband was also her lover, and when she had been well content. In a woman's Paradise sooner or later the serpent is sure to come, and the gates of Eden had closed on poor Constance only too soon. The shock of disillusion is harder to bear than the pangs of parting or even the utter desolation that death brings in its train. A woman cannot go on loving a man whose every action proclaims him selfish and contemptible. There comes a time when her eyes are opened, when she sees him as he is, and there is no resurrection for a love that has died of its own unworthiness.

Constance realised all this, and yet he had been the father of her children—she could never forget that. She did not see Lord Hardstock again. He bitterly resented her going at all, and somehow managed to enlist Mrs. Strangways' sympathies in his cause. Rebecca had never been troubled with much sentiment, and spoke her mind very plainly to her sister. But Constance was inexorable.

"I do not think I even wish to remain," she said. "I shall be happier in London, where I can see you constantly, and, then, too, Arthur can go to school. Quite a little house will do for myself and Eva. I

am rather surprised that you should not see things in the same light that I do."

"I think you are nourishing an antipathy to a man who would be a friend to you if you would let him," replied Rebecca.

"A woman in my position must choose her friends with great caution. I believe that Lord Hardstock is sincere in his expressions of kindly feeling towards me, but that does not alter the fact that Grey-stone belongs to him, and that therefore it is impossible I can ever make it my home."

"He declares he will shut it up and never come near it again," said Rebecca.

"He must please himself," answered Constance, coldly, "it is a matter of supreme indifference to me."

## CHAPTER VII.

MRS. ARMITAGE remained in Clarges Street with the Strangways until Christmas was over, and then she resolved to take a little *pied-à-terre* of her own. However small it might be she was certain that she would be happier in being independent. Arthur was sent to a public school, where, like most English boys, he was soon contented enough, and Constance found a house in West Kensington, at a low rental, which she felt would suit her requirements.

Rebecca saw no reason why her sister should not take up her residence permanently under her roof, but to this Constance would not agree. There were many points on which she and Rebecca differed, and it is rarely wise for very near relations to live together; as a rule, they are infinitely better friends apart.

But above and beyond all, there was one vital reason why Constance must have a home of her own. Little Eva, who was the apple of her mother's eye, had become quite a bone of contention since she had been beneath her aunt's roof. Mrs. Strangways was not accustomed to

children. She was not particularly fond of them, and expected a uniform obedience and docility that she failed to find in Eva. That young lady was not a model child; she had been more or less spoiled all her life, and having been accustomed to an open-air freedom, she did not take kindly to the restrictions now imposed upon her. Constance felt that she would be entirely ruined if this state of things were to continue.

“Eva is not a naughty child,” she remarked to her sister, when that lady had been enlarging upon the little girl’s mischievous proclivities; “you cannot expect an old head on such young shoulders.”

“My dear Constance, when I was a child I was made to behave myself. I had to sit still, whether I liked it or not; and I do not see why the children of the present generation should be allowed to do exactly as they please.”

Mrs. Armitage made no reply. She knew that Eva was very far from perfect; but after all her children were the two things on earth their mother loved, and their well-being would always come before every other consideration.

A good deal of the furniture, and her own personal effects, were forwarded from



Greystone, and for many days Constance was busied in making her new home bright and cheerful. At the end of the week she had settled down with a comfortable feeling that there was nothing more to be done, and that everything was very snug and cosy. Lord Hardstock had kept up the establishment precisely as in its late owner's lifetime, and Pratt, who had been with Mrs. Armitage for some years, was most anxious to re-enter her service. It gave Constance a real pang to be obliged to refuse, but the wages she had once given were far beyond her present resources, and she was disinclined to offer less, although indeed the woman was so devoted to her mistress that she would gladly have taken what she could afford to give her. She therefore came to the conclusion that the matter was not to be thought of.

"But, ma'am, you must have somebody to do for you." Poor Pratt was really wounded. It was difficult to make her understand that Mrs. Armitage no longer required a maid, and she went away feeling both hurt and angry. Perhaps Constance had never felt her loss of wealth so keenly as now.

One morning as she came down to breakfast, she found a letter by her plate;

it was from Lord Hardstock, and ran as follows :

“DEAR MRS. ARMITAGE,—

“Perhaps you may have heard that I am sending the horses to Tattersall’s. It is extremely unlikely that I shall remain here. In the meantime your favourite mare, Judith, and your phaeton will accompany the others and await your instructions where they are to be sent. I could not bear to think that Judith should be driven by any hand but yours. Then, too, you must have some means of getting about. You will not, I am sure, refuse to accept what after all is actually your own property.

“Always sincerely yours,

“HARDSTOCK.”

Constance was troubled. No doubt the offer was kindly meant, and had been made with a good deal of tact. It was impossible that she could do anything but accept it in the same spirit, though she hated to place herself under an obligation to this man. It was gall and wormwood to her. Rebecca was loud in her praises when she heard of Lord Hardstock’s liberality.

“Upon my word,” said she, “you are

a most unreasonable woman. I cannot imagine what fault you have to find with the man. He is courtly and polished and handsome, and would do a great deal more for you, if you would only let him."

"That is precisely the point," said Constance, coldly. "I prefer not to accept benefits at his hands."

Mrs. Strangways laid down her work and looked at her sister. "You know that he has let Greystone?" she said.

"Yes, Pratt told me. It does not much signify who lives there, as I am never likely to cross its threshold again."

She sighed as she spoke, for it had been somewhat of a shock to learn that the property that should have been her boy's had actually passed into the hands of strangers.

"Do you know how long it is let for?"

"No. What do you mean?"

"This is what I mean, Constance," said Mrs. Strangways, impressively, as she felt the occasion demanded. "I mean that there can be only one interpretation to be put upon Lord Hardstock's action in the matter. He has let Greystone for one year only, leaving it optional whether he returns there or not."

"How can that possibly affect me?"

"You must indeed be blind if you

cannot see that. Constance, you must surely know that it rests with yourself whether you ever go back to Greystone as mistress."

Mrs. Armitage was too angry to make any reply; she was furious at Rebecca having hinted at such a possibility. With an effort she regained her self-control.

"Will you kindly ring the bell, and let Wilson get me a hansom?" she said, as she rose from her chair. "I am going home."

During the three or four minutes that elapsed before the cab was at the door the sisters sat in silence; and when Constance swept downstairs and out of the house with the coldest of good-byes on her lips, Mrs. Strangways realised that she had made a terrible mistake, and that despite her sister's weakness and gentleness she could be roused to a very good imitation of what she, Rebecca, called temper.

And as she drove home Constance pressed her white teeth on her under lip. "How dare she?" she cried. "How dare she suggest anything so horrible? What have I ever done that she should say such things to me?" Arriving home she put her latch-key in the door, walked quickly upstairs to the drawing-room, and stood face to face with Lord Hardstock. There

he sat comfortably ensconced in a big chair with Eva perched on his lap looking very much at home. What was Constance to do? There was but one thing possible—to hold out her hand in greeting. But there was no warmth in her manner, and she carefully refrained from expressing anything but surprise at seeing him. She unbuttoned her gloves and sat down, wondering how long he intended to stop, and almost as if he read her thoughts he said, “I have been waiting more than an hour to see you. I am only passing through town, as I am off to Monte Carlo.”

Constance breathed more freely.

“Lord Hardstock would not have tea with me, mamma, because he said it was nearly your dinner time,” said Eva.

“I am afraid——” began Constance, nervously.

“You are going out this evening. What a disappointment! I had hoped for a couple of hours’ chat, as I shall be off too early to-morrow to see you again.”

Constance resigned herself to the inevitable. She told Lord Hardstock that she was going nowhere, and that if he would join her simple meal she would be pleased, and then she went upstairs wearily to lay her bonnet aside and to

reflect how awkwardly things had turned out.

“Well, it cannot be helped,” she said aloud, as she smoothed her ruffled hair. “It is better that he should remain an hour or two now than come again to-morrow.”

As I have already said, Lord Hardstock was a brilliant conversationalist—no man living could be more charming and amiable than he when he had a motive for being so, and to-night he was at his best. In spite of herself Constance was amused and entertained. By neither word nor look did he offend, scrupulously careful to steer clear of any dangerous subject, and after Eva had gone to bed instead of going away as Mrs. Armitage expected him to do, he sat down at the piano and sang several songs and sang them remarkably well.

“You did not know I could sing?” he asked, with a twinkle in his eye, noting her astonishment.

“No, indeed, I did not.”

“I wonder if you know very much about me in any respect, Mrs. Armitage? Ah, I have led a curious life. I have been face to face with starvation more than once, and if anyone had told me that I should wake up some fine morning and find myself rich and still be unsatisfied

and discontented I should have thought it a good joke. And yet that day has come."

"Sing me something else," said Constance, quickly

He smiled and turned again to the piano.

"Once long ago when the scent of the roses  
Lay in the light of the glad summer day,  
Someone I loved gathered one snow-white blossom,  
And gave it to me as his ship sailed away."

"He said but one word, my darling, my darling!  
I love you as dearly as e'er man loved yet,  
So ever since then the scent of the roses  
Awakes in my heart a strange throb of regret.  
Ever since then, ever since then,  
Ever since then, love, ever since then."

There were tears in Constance's eyes when the last note of Hope Temple's beautiful song died away. She was vexed with herself that she should be so moved.

Lord Hardstock strolled over to the fire. "You are not looking well—a town life does not suit you."

"On the contrary, I am in excellent health. I get a good deal of exercise one way and another."

"But you must miss the pure Norfolk air?"

"No, I don't think I do, and I am very fond of London."

It was ten o'clock before Lord Hardstock took his leave. Constance was surprised to find it was so late.

"I hope I have not outstayed my welcome," he said, as he held the slim fingers in his own. And Constance almost blushed as she recalled her ungraciousness. She had never liked him so well before, or rather had never disliked him so little. Satan can sometimes pass as an angel of light, and Lord Hardstock was not only a well-bred man, but quite clever enough to make the most of an opportunity. He had set his heart upon winning the love of this woman, and he was determined to move Heaven and earth to ensure his success.



## CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. STRANGWAYS might be forgiven for calling her sister inconsistent when she heard of that *tête-à-tête* dinner as she did from Lord Hardstock's own lips. Constance doubtless had her reasons for acting thus, but it certainly looked odd.

"I confess I do not understand," said she to Mr. Strangways, "why Constance should have marched out of my house in that high and mighty fashion, simply because I hinted that Lord Hardstock was in love with her, and then have gone home and spent the evening alone with him."

But Mr. Strangways, poor man, had long ago given up all hope of fathoming the vagaries of the gentler sex and contented himself with mildly shaking his head. His sister-in-law was a woman, and therefore in his judgment an unreasonable animal.

"She will explain her motives, I dare say," he remarked, blandly, with the laudable intention of pouring oil upon the troubled waters.

But that is exactly what Constance did not do; indeed she never referred to the subject at all, and consequently Rebecca

waxed wroth, and at length could keep silent no longer.

"We are going to dine at Sir George Foster's to-morrow," she remarked, as she and her sister were driving together in the Park (Sir George was a famous judge, and since their student days had been a great friend of Mr. Strangways). "I do wish you could have gone with us; you would have enjoyed it, I think."

"I very much doubt it," said Constance with a laugh. "I know what those dinners are, tiresome and tedious in the extreme."

"You would at least have met one congenial spirit," said Rebecca, somewhat sharply. "Lord Hardstock is going to be there."

Constance blushed guiltily.

"I thought—that is to say, I understood that he had gone to Monte Carlo," she stammered.

"Did you? That is curious, for as a matter of fact I believe he did intend going there, had not some unexpected business cropped up to keep him in town."

Mrs. Armitage's heart sank; she regretted her cordiality and civility now that she found that Lord Hardstock was to be at her right hand. She felt secure believing that he would be miles away.

But in reality she had nothing to fear. Lord Hardstock was far too astute to push beyond proper limits any advantage he might have gained. He did not appear at the little *ménage* in West Kensington for more than a fortnight, and when he did appear he came under Mrs. Strangways' wing.

Rebecca was one of those individuals so often to be met with who would not have been happy if the rose leaves of existence did not hold some thorns, and Constance's affairs promised a fertile ground for grumbling. The vexed point which now troubled her was the lonely life her sister was leading.

"In the first place it is not good for you, Constance," she remarked one day, "and moreover, it does not look well. You ought to have a companion."

"My dear Rebecca, what in the world should I do with one? I could not endure to have anybody at my heels all day long."

"Surely you feel dull sometimes?" said Lord Hardstock, who with Eva on his lap sat at some little distance.

Constance did not reply, but she fixed a keen, distrustful look upon him. Had he inoculated her sister with these absurd notions?

Then Rebecca took up the theme. "Of course, she must be horribly dull and lonely," she said.

"I am neither one nor the other. Eva is quite companion enough for me."

Rebecca caught gratefully at the mention of her niece's name. "For her sake quite as much as your own you really ought to have someone," she said, firmly "I suppose that it has never occurred to you that when you are away from home your child is left entirely to the servants. Besides, she is old enough now to receive some instruction."

Constance began to waver. She was ready to do anything for Eva's good, but she felt that if the child must be taught, she herself was the proper person to undertake the task. Then, too, it was annoying that this discussion should have taken place in the presence of a stranger, and she could not but consider that her sister was wanting in tact to have introduced it.

„ There is ample time for study in Eva's case," she said quietly. "At present I see no occasion for either governess or companion."

"It is a pity you should set your face against it," answered Mrs. Strangways; "you are strangely perverse at times, Constance."

"Am I? Well, you see, this is a matter in which I may perhaps be pardoned for considering myself the best judge."

"I fail to see your reasons."

"There is one reason apart from everything else that would preclude all possibility of such a thing. With my present income I could not afford it."

"That need not stand in the way, my dear Mrs. Armitage, if you will permit me to discuss the matter with you," said Lord Hardstock. "I know of a charming woman who would be only too delighted to give her services in exchange for a home such as this would be. She is a lady in every sense of the word, and I am sure my little friend here would love her dearly," he continued, bestowing a kiss on Eva, who, small coquette as she was, hung her head bashfully, and then flung her arms round his neck and returned the embrace with interest.

"Your friend may be a model of all the virtues," said Constance, coldly, "but I do not intend to engage anybody. I could not possibly accept services for which I paid nothing; and, as I have already told you, my present expenses forbid me to add another member to my household."

"In that case there is no more to be said," answered Lord Hardstock.

"How provoking you can be, Con-

stance!" said Rebecca. "Did you not hear that this lady would consider a home ample recompense for her services?"

"I repeat that I should very much dislike any such arrangement."

"Ah! if you could only see Miss Baillie you would change your mind," said Lord Hardstock, eagerly. "I am sure you would find her perfectly charming. The idea has only occurred to me since we have been sitting here. But if it could be arranged, it would be a positive boon to her, poor girl, for her income is now so small since the death of her father (who, by the way, was colonel of the 100th Hussars), that it is absolutely necessary she should find a home. It is really a great pity."

"Yes," said Mrs. Armitage, softly, "no doubt it is a pity." And she adroitly turned the conversation into another channel, and neither Lord Hardstock nor her sister had an opportunity of referring to the subject again.

But this was by no means the last that Constance was to hear of it. On the principle that constant dropping must wear away a stone, Mrs. Strangways instilled into Constance's mind on every possible occasion the risk that little Eva ran of acquiring vulgar habits from intercourse with the servants, and as spring

came round, Mrs. Armitage began to realise that the child was left to herself a good deal, and was growing more wilful and less amenable to control every day. But she hated to have a stranger about her, and yet for Eva's sake she was prepared to make any sacrifice.

And so at last Mrs. Strangways carried her point. Constance would not have a companion for herself, but it might be better that her little girl should be under the care of a kind, good woman, who would watch over her and check her faults, as poor Constance with a sigh acknowledged that she was incapable of doing. But it was a very great concession, and having made it, she felt desperately inclined to revoke her promise.

"Understand one thing, Rebecca," she said to her sister, a day or two later, "I will myself choose the person to whom I entrust the education of my child. I am perfectly capable of forming my own opinion, and should not dream of engaging anybody whom I did not personally select."

"It is a pity you did not say so sooner," cried Mrs. Strangways, angrily, "for I wrote to Lord Hardstock last night and told him that you had consented to receive Miss Baillie."

"You wrote to Lord Hardstock!"

echoed Constance. "Pray what is the reason for this extraordinary interest you both appear to take in this person? I confess it puzzles me."

"I never saw her in my life, but from what I am told she appears to be exactly what you require. For goodness' sake, Constance, try and be a little reasonable. I am sorry I have written, since you seem vexed at my having done so, but after what has happened I trust you will at least see the girl and judge for yourself. It can do no harm, and Lord Hardstock would think it so odd."

"I think it odd, but I suppose that is of no consequence," reiterated Mrs. Armitage, bitterly. "Set your mind at rest, Rebecca. I will see this paragon, but remember that I will not be cajoled or coaxed into engaging her unless I choose to do so."

"Nobody could possibly wish that," answered Mrs. Strangways, considerably relieved.

Miss Baillie had certainly everything against her when she paid her first visit to West Kensington. Constance had fully made up her mind to decline her services courteously, but as decidedly as possible. But at the end of a quarter of an hour Mrs. Armitage had begun to waver;



before another five minutes had passed her objections and other prejudices were melting one by one into thin air, and when the half hour struck Eva was sent for, and Eva herself decided the question. "I do not want Miss Baillie to go away, mama. I love her."

The child had joined forces with the enemy and Constance was routed. Miss Baillie was not in the very least like what Mrs. Armitage had expected her to be. Nothing had been said about her personal appearance and Constance had pictured her as tall, gaunt, and masculine, but Emily Baillie was a beautiful blonde, rather under than over the medium height, with heavy masses of sunny hair, and large brown eyes, and her voice was that most excellent thing in women—low and sweet. She gave Constance the impression of being much younger than she really was. It was a case of *veni, vidi, vici*.

"I sincerely trust that I have not done a foolish thing," said Mrs. Armitage to herself that same night, when Miss Baillie's winsome face and caressing voice had ceased to charm. "But they all seemed to wish it, and, after all, it is not irrevocable, for at any moment I can retire from my bargain. If Eva is happy and contented that is the main thing."

## CHAPTER IX.

DURING the weeks that followed, Mrs. Armitage was compelled to confess that the governess was a success, looked at from every point of view—all that could possibly be desired. Under her influence Eva became tractable and docile. The little child's fits of passion were things of the past; she was bright and happy and devoted to her new friend. For once in her life Constance acknowledged that her sister had been wiser than she, and half hesitatingly thanked Lord Hardstock for having sent such a treasure.

Rebecca held up her head with that affectation of superiority she so often assumed when talking to her sister.

"Your fondness for your child completely blinds you to her many faults," she said. "It is a happy thing for her that we interfered, or assuredly she would have been entirely spoiled."

About the middle of March came an invitation from Gerald Armitage. Would Constance go to Paris, and spend a month with them? It was a tempting offer.

"Daphne is longing to be introduced

to her sister-in-law," wrote Gerald. "You shall be as quiet as you please — only come."

"If Miss Baillie were not here it would be impossible to leave Eva," reflected Constance, "but as it is I really do not see why I should not go."

Rebecca was not very enthusiastic over the idea. She hinted that it was rather too soon to think of going into society again.

Her sister's opposition determined Constance. She felt that it would be a real relief to get away for a time, and so she resolved to accept her brother-in-law's invitation. After she had penned her note to him she sat irresolutely biting the top off her pen, and unable to make up her mind whether to write a certain other letter or not. For if she was going to Paris she would of course see Basil St. Quentin, and she told herself that he would not take it kindly if she did not let him know that she was going. She had had three or four letters from him in as many months. He was not a good correspondent, but somehow Constance reading between the lines was well satisfied with what they told. Finally she dashed off a hasty line and sent the two letters out at once to be posted.

With all the contrariety of woman, Mrs.

Armitage felt somewhat hurt that Eva showed so little emotion at the prospect of her mother's departure ; as a matter of fact she ought to have been relieved, since it undeniably made things smoother. And yet the foolish woman had some difficulty in restraining a tear. The truth is, children were slaves in the past and are slaves up to the present moment. If they are happy they rarely look ahead, and Miss Baillie had already made such admirable use of her opportunities that her little pupil was devoted to her. She could dress dolls and make funny old women out of bread-crumbs, with scarlet cloaks and baskets on their backs to hold matches, and she could sing quaint nursery ditties that delighted Eva, and she was pretty to look at. Five years old asks for nothing beyond.

There was one person who, in common with Mrs. Strangways, would have put a veto on this visit if he had dared, and that person was Lord Hardstock. During the month that Miss Baillie had lived with her, Lord Hardstock had been conspicuous by his absence, and for this Constance was duly grateful. She could never overcome a certain shrinking and aversion with which he had always inspired her, though she took herself soundly to task for it, analysing her reasons and failing to find any

valid ones, and yet unable to tutor herself into anything else.

The afternoon before she left town she found him in her sister's drawing-room. She had wished Rebecca good-bye, and it was quite an afterthought that she should have gone to Clarges Street at all, but having forgotten a certain commission she took Eva and her governess and drove over in the pony carriage.

Lord Hardstock was alone in the room when she went in.

"I was coming to see you to-night," he said, with quite an aggrieved air. "I think you might have let me know you were going out of town."

"Why should I?" answered Constance, with a laugh. "I did not suppose you would be particularly interested in my movements."

"I often wonder if you have the least idea how much pain you inflict upon me by affecting an ignorance respecting my feelings towards you."

Constance looked him full in the face. "I am at a loss to understand what you can possibly mean," she said, icily. At that moment to her inexpressible relief Mrs. Strangways entered the room, and the conversation became general. When she rose to go Lord Hardstock

accompanied her downstairs, and helped her into the carriage, shaking hands with Miss Baillie and pinching Eva's soft cheek, and when he had tucked the rugs closely about her he bent his head humbly.

"May I come and make my peace this evening?" Constance was somewhat disconcerted, conscious that the eyes of the governess were fixed upon her.

"I am sorry that I shall not be at home to-night," she said. "So I will say good-bye now, Lord Hardstock."

Her fingers rested on his for a second only, and, feeling considerably snubbed and crestfallen, Lord Hardstock went back to Mrs. Strangways. That lady was becoming quite an ally of his. Truth to tell, she felt sorry for him, believing that her sister was coquetting in a way that she could never have credited, and she was ready to do anything in her power to further his love suit, and Lord Hardstock was duly grateful. Constance drove home at a pace she rarely indulged in, flicking her whip over Judith's satin coat in a way wholly unfamiliar to the grey mare. She was very angry. Lord Hardstock seemed irrepressible. It seemed impossible to make him understand that his attentions were unwelcome.

"If it were for no other reason than

to rid myself of him I should be glad to leave London," she said to herself, and on the morrow she left by the mid-day train

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"Yes, it's very pleasant. I do precisely as I like, but it is the least bit embarrassing at times to parry questions. That pleasing little fiction about my father, for instance—the Colonel of the 100th Hussars—I could laugh when I think of it." The speaker was Emily Baillie and her companion Lord Hardstock.

Mrs. Armitage would have been very much astonished could she have seen her governess curled up on a couch in Lord Hardstock's rooms in the Albany with a cigarette between her lips. But luckily for some of us sinners, the instrument has not yet been invented that enables our friends and acquaintances to see over the miles of space that the telephone bridges. And so Emily Baillie smoked on in blissful security

"It is too funny," said the girl, with a low musical laugh, as she lay and watched the rings of smoke above her head. And then her thoughts went back to the night, some six months ago, when she had first seen Lord Hardstock. The Ambassadeurs in the Champs Elysées

had been crowded, and Emily in virgin white, very *décolletée*, but decidedly bewitching, had trilled forth her song, which truth compels me to admit was somewhat risky :

“ C’est l’ soir de notr’ mariag’ seul’ment  
Qu’Arthur m’ presenta Ferdinand,  
Son cher petit frère.”

And the rest of it.

Lord Hardstock was charmed, and when “Mademoiselle de Fanu,” as she was called in the programme, read the word or two handed to her by her dresser, she quietly put on her hat, adjusted her veil, and wrapping a cloak round her, joined her latest admirer with the utmost *sangfroid*.

The acquaintance thus begun ripened and expanded into a very fair imitation of what in the latter part of the 19th century passes current for love ; anyhow it was so at least on Lord Hardstock’s side. He swore that he could not live without Emily, and that he had never been so hard hit before, and he managed at least to convince Mademoiselle de Fanu that he was sincere, as he doubtless was.

The young lady’s vanity was tickled. Her new conquest commended itself to her. She was tantalising and bewildering and—what surprised Lord Hardstock more than



a little--within a month after their *liaison* had commenced she began to speak of marriage, and indeed to name it as the price of her continuing in his society. Lord Hardstock, of course, regarded the idea as utterly absurd. But Mademoiselle de Fanu professed to take an entirely different view.

"Why should you not marry me?" she argued. "I am fairly well educated, and I should pass muster in society. You would never be ashamed of me, although I was born in a circus tent, and understand jumping through the hoops and the *haute école*. Ah, those were jolly days! How I hated Aunt Tabitha when she 'rescued' me, as she persisted in calling it, and sent me to school, where I was licked into shape and taught manners; but I have since learned to be grateful to her, although I shall always be more or less a Bohemian. It is in the blood, I suppose."

"You will always be a beautiful woman, Emily," Lord Hardstock answered, admiringly, and then he changed the conversation. The subject of matrimony was not at all to his taste. This was in the first golden days of August, and he had contrived never to lose sight of her since. She interested him, and he was never insensible to the charm of a beautiful face,

and at last he promised to marry her. Of course he never had the slightest intention of keeping his word, but the promise successfully satisfied any misgivings Emily herself might have had, and she was perfectly content. And then Lord Hardstock suddenly discovered that this girl might be made very useful to him, and on the pretence of wishing her to associate with that society she would ultimately enter, he persuaded her to accept her present position in Mrs. Armitage's household.

"You like your life then?" asked Lord Hardstock, after a pause.

"Like it!" she echoed. "If you were sent to prison would you like it?"

"It will not last long," said he; "you must be patient, my darling."

"All the same I don't see the use of it. It is horrible being on probation, as it were."

"You shall not stop a day longer than you wish."

"It is so dull," said Emily, with a yawn "there are no visitors except women, and not many of them."

"It agrees with you nevertheless." Lord Hardstock's eye travelled down the beautiful figure in its clinging draperies, and its rounded contours and voluptuous curves. "A lazy life suits you."

“I warn you that it won’t suit me for long,” she cried, rebelliously “You will have to marry me soon, Rupert, or——”

“There is no need for threats,” he said, sulkily “When the right time comes I shall keep my word.”

## CHAPTER X.

CONSTANCE had rarely seen so lovely a woman as Daphne. It seemed very absurd to call her a woman; she was nothing more than a beautiful child with soft dark hair, cut across her brow in a quaint old-fashioned style that suited her to perfection, and two delicious dimples keeping guard over her rosy mouth. When Mrs. Armitage saw her first she was dressed in a loose white gown, girded at the waist with a broad gold belt and fastened on each shoulder with a clasp of the same, leaving the white, soft, rounded arms bare. Then, too, she was such a tiny little body, scarcely reaching to Constance's shoulder, and being compelled to raise herself on tiptoe to embrace and bid her welcome.

"Well, Daphne, she is here quite safely, you see," said Gerald, with a smile. Mr. Armitage had met his sister-in-law at the station and escorted her to the Faubourg St. Germain himself. "My wife has been imagining all sorts of horrors," he added, turning to Constance. "She was certain that there would be a storm in the Channel or that the train would run off the line."

“What a shame!” cried Daphne. “I never imagined anything so foolish; all I said was that I should be frightened to travel alone.”

“Well, curiously enough, this is my first experience,” said Mrs. Armitage, “but I have not met with a single misadventure, and the journey has been a remarkably pleasant one, though I am not fond of travelling.”

And then Daphne carried off her visitor to the pretty guest chamber, where everything was the perfection of daintiness and comfort.

“Do you think you will manage to like me?” she asked, gravely, as she shut the door and looked up wistfully into Constance’s face.

Mrs. Armitage was not an emotional woman as a rule, but something moved her to draw the little figure into her arms and kiss the upturned childish face warmly. And so began a friendship that was to be very precious to them both.

But before many days had passed Constance’s eyes were opened to the extreme wilfulness of her little sister-in-law. It must be confessed that Daphne’s character was by no means so perfect as her face and figure. Like the majority of her sex her temper was very variable, and

when she was annoyed she lost all control over herself. Then, too, she was vain and greedy for admiration; and warm-hearted, loving, and affectionate as the little lady undoubtedly was, Constance trembled for the peace of mind of Daphne's husband.

Gerald himself broached the subject as he and his sister-in-law strolled leisurely through the Tuileries Gardens. "Well," said he, "I am waiting for your congratulations or condolences on my marriage. My friends have not spared me, I can promise you. The male kind have congratulated me, but the ladies"—he shrugged his shoulders, and broke off impatiently.

"The women pardoned all except her face," quoted Constance, softly.

"Her beauty is undeniable. Tell me just what you think, Constance. I would rather have your honest opinion than that of anyone I know."

"I think," said she, slowly and thoughtfully, "that there must be an immense deal of tact and discretion on your part if you are to be happy together."

"You are right," said Mr Armitage, with a sigh; "it was only the other day that I heard myself described as the husband of a spoiled baby—yet I am the happiest man in the world."

Instinct seldom plays a woman false.

Would it, could it last? reflected Constance. They were such heedless little hands to hold a man's happiness, and yet this man had surrendered his whole life into their keeping, without a single misgiving, showering the rich treasures of his love upon his child wife, withholding nothing, giving of his best right royally. So few of us either understand or practise economy of the affections.

But it was a narrow, selfish little soul which Constance strove to gauge, utterly incapable of appreciating the devotion of the man she called husband. Daphne's own interests and pursuits were ever uppermost—the caprice of the moment to be gratified at any cost, and her world bordered by purely sensuous glorification of her small self. But it might well be that there were depths untouched, unreachd, beneath the surface worthlessness, and that something noble and beautiful would yet blossom from amid the weeds and tares.

Constance had been in Paris four days when a letter was brought to her one morning, and she appeared slightly embarrassed as she opened it.

“With your permission, my dear Daphne,” she said, “I shall have a visitor this afternoon. Mr. St. Quentin, a very old friend of mine, is coming to call on me.”

"Old?" said Daphne, puckering up her face; "oh, dear! they are always old, perfect antediluvians, all Gerald's friends."

"He is not old in that sense of the term," answered Constance. "He is about my age, or a year or two my senior—I am not quite sure."

"And is he handsome? Do say that he is handsome."

"Yes, you will think so, I dare say."

"Then I am happy" Daphne lay back in her chair and clasped her plump hands behind her head. "Young and handsome—it will be my first experience of the article since I married."

A cloud rose to Mr. Armitage's face. In his opinion jesting such as this was unseemly.

"I should imagine that Constance will prefer to receive her visitor alone," he remarked, pointedly; but his sister-in-law vehemently negatived any such idea.

"Certainly not," said she. "We have no secrets to discuss, I can assure you."

Mr. St. Quentin was unfeignedly pleased to meet Mrs. Armitage again, but he thought her looking pale and thin.

"The life in London does not suit you, I am afraid," he said, anxiously. But Constance shook her head and declared that she was in perfect health.



"Why, I have seen you before," cried Daphne, when presented to the young man, a delicious blush creeping over her pretty face, "but I cannot recollect where. I think it was—" and then she came to a full stop and looked up beseechingly into the dark eyes fixed upon her.

"It was at Galignani's, mademoiselle," he answered. "You were with your father, I believe."

Daphne broke into a ringing laugh. "I am madame," she cried, merrily, "and the gentleman you refer to was my husband."

"I beg a thousand pardons."

It was certainly somewhat of a surprise to Mr. St. Quentin to find that the young lady who, while her companion was engaged in turning over some new books at Galignani's, had amused herself by returning his admiring glances, should prove to be Mrs. Armitage's sister-in-law. But lovely and fascinating though Daphne undoubtedly was, Basil was a good deal disappointed to find that he was not to see Constance for five minutes alone. It never entered into Daphne's giddy little head to imagine that she might be in the way, and Constance too, perhaps refrained from touching on certain subjects she might have discussed had it not been for her sister-in-law's presence.

"We shall meet again soon, I hope," he said, as he rose at length to take his leave.

"Oh, yes," cried Daphne, "come as often as you like and stay as long as ever you can. We are horribly dull sometimes." And the moment the door had closed upon the young man she turned to Constance and said triumphantly, "Gerald cannot possibly object, you see, because he is your friend. I am sure he would not be inhospitable and surly. That is his great fault you know," she added, lowering her voice, "he is jealous! Isn't it ridiculous? I am sure he might go out every night of his life if he wanted to. I should not care a scrap so long, of course, as I was permitted to enjoy myself. I think it is stupid to see so much of one another; don't you? I do so long for a little variety sometimes."

She looked so sweet and loveable as she trilled out her little heresies, that genuinely shocked though Constance was, she felt tongue-tied. One might with as much show of reason have argued with a baby. Daphne had not the faintest conception that she was saying anything she ought not to have said.

A few days later Basil St. Quentin was invited to dine with the Armitages, and spent a very pleasant evening. Daphne

was bubbling over with life and spirits. She was quite irrepressible, and although Mr. Armitage kept a disapproving eye upon her, yet in blissful ignorance of anything amiss, she chattered, and laughed, and looked her brightest and loveliest.

"What a butterfly she is!" whispered St. Quentin to his old friend. "A beautiful woman without a soul."

Constance looked at him quickly. He, at least, had not fallen a victim to the blandishments of the siren. And she was glad of it, though she could hardly have explained the feeling of uneasiness that had taken possession of her since these two had recognised each other.

"She is wonderfully warm-hearted," she replied, taking up the cudgels. "I have become very much attached to her. She is such a child that one cannot expect a great amount of sense and decorum. She is barely eighteen, and lived a life of the most perfect seclusion in the house of her guardian, Mr. Benbow, a wealthy tea-planter in Assam, where my brother-in-law met her, and fell in love with her."

"It strikes me that he will find her a handful," said St. Quentin, indifferently, but the next moment he bent forward and in an altered tone added, "I have so much to talk about, and so much to ask, and so much to

listen to. Am I never going to get you to myself ? ”

“ It may be a little difficult, but perhaps it may be managed,” she answered. “ My sister-in-law is going to spend next Tuesday with some friends at Neuilly—and if you like to call then——”

“ I will. Thank you so much.”

Constance felt like a conspirator and pushed her chair further back, nor did they speak again, until Daphne sprang up from the music stool. “ There,” she cried naïvely, “ I have not made a single mistake from beginning to end. I really think I ought to be praised and my head aches terribly. You see you can’t give the proper amount of expression unless you thump the notes well.”

After their guest was gone, and husband and wife were alone, Daphne drew a low stool to Gerald’s side and nestled her dark head against his shoulder.

“ It is nice to have visitors sometimes,” she said, in a cooing tone ; “ now confess that it is.”

“ Perhaps you are right, but I, for my own part, am very well content with you, my darling.”

“ We have been married ten months, and it is high time that we remembered the world holds someone else besides ourselves.”

"And shall we be happier for the knowledge?"

"I shall," answered Daphne promptly.

"My sweet child, I fear sometimes that I am too old and grave for you," he said, earnestly. "But with all my heart I love you and wish only for your happiness."

She made him no reply, but she rubbed her soft cheek up and down his arm in a pretty, kittenish way.

Daphne hated sentiment. She was a practical little woman in many things, and what she had not objected to in the honeymoon, when all was new and strange and wonderful, now appeared to her absurd and unnecessary.

"You like Mr. St. Quentin, dear?" she asked.

"Oh yes, I like him well enough."

But it was not of his sister-in-law's friend that he wanted to converse, and he turned away with the unsatisfied feeling he so often experienced, when Daphne gathered up the train of the cream-coloured gown she wore, and laughingly declared she would get no beauty sleep if she did not hurry off to bed at once.

"If my roses fade, there won't be much left worth having," said she.

And very possibly Daphne was right.

## CHAPTER XI.

CONSTANCE kept her word and had a quiet hour's chat with St. Quentin during the following week. Daphne had taken her coquettish little self away, all unconscious of the small conspiracy against her. At the young man's suggestion, Constance instructed the maid that as her mistress was not at home, she herself would not be visible to anybody, and this secured peace and privacy.

"And now tell me everything," said St. Quentin, feasting his eyes on the sweet face of his companion, when at last they found themselves alone.

And Mrs. Armitage did tell everything without reservation.

St. Quentin's brow darkened as he listened. "I utterly mistrust Lord Hardstock," he said, curtly. "I implore you to be careful not to get into his power."

"It is only fair to say that he has behaved very generously to me," replied Constance, "and indeed he would have done still more for me if I would have permitted it."

“My dear Mrs. Armitage, as a woman of the world, you must know that there can be but one interpretation to be put upon his actions. You either like him well enough to take what he offers, or——”

And breaking off abruptly he quitted her side and strolled over to the window, where he stood looking out for several minutes. Then he turned round and in quite an altered tone started a fresh subject, nor did he return to Lord Hardstock again, for which Constance was profoundly grateful. “What with Rebecca on one side and Mr. St. Quentin on the other it seems that I am never be left in peace. It is really too bad,” said the poor lady to herself.

But looking back on that lengthened *tête-à-tête* Mrs. Armitage was surprised at the amount of pleasure she had taken in it. She was always at her brightest and best when in St. Quentin’s society, and more at ease with him than with anybody else. The truth was that she felt that he understood her and sympathised with her. A woman’s instinct is rarely wrong, and in her heart of hearts Constance knew that Basil had drifted perilously near the narrow boundary that divides friendship from her tropical sister, love, and that it only needed a word from her to precipitate

an avowal. Communing with her own soul, she told herself that this man was worthy of affection, and then she hid her face in her hands with a sigh.

"He ought to marry a young and innocent girl," she thought bitterly, "not a woman worn and saddened as I am—as I must ever be. It is but the dregs of life that I should give him in exchange for this loyalty. And after all a woman who is a mother should never marry again." She felt inclined to chide herself for having, even for a moment, allowed the possibility to cross her mind.

But the question was not to be so lightly dismissed. And this time it was the heedless Daphne who broached the subject.

"What curious creatures men are," she cried. "Gerald declares that Mr. St. Quentin is violently in love with you. I am afraid my husband is a great donkey," she continued, with a little air of self-consciousness that was eminently amusing. "Anyhow he has no eyes; although after all it is perhaps better that he should think that you are the attraction that brings Mr. St. Quentin here so often."

"Then do you not think that I am?"

Daphne looked up in wonder into her sister-in-law's face.

"Why, no," said she, "of course not."



“You mean, then, that you are?”

This was plain speaking and Daphne looked somewhat embarrassed.

“In that case you would be acting both wrongly and foolishly in inviting him here so often,” said Constance gravely. “Merely to gratify your own love of admiration I am sure that you never could be so wicked as to ruin the peace of mind of one man by encouraging a hopeless passion, and, what is of far more importance, wreck the whole life of another. I mean your husband. Forgive me, my dear little sister, if I who am so much older than yourself give you a word of warning and point out the obligations of a married life. Be true to your nobler and better self; rise above the trivialities and follies that are so dear to you now, for believe me the only real pleasure and happiness for anyone is to be content in doing her duty.”

“Dear me—what a tirade!” laughed the girl, mockingly. “What have I done to bring such a storm down on to my head?”

Constance was silent. And bye-and-bye Daphne’s heart rebuked her, and she stole softly to her sister-in-law’s side.

“Forgive me,” she said, humbly. “I am afraid I am very wilful and perverse, but sometimes”—and then she hesitated and looked down—“sometimes I feel I ought

never to have married. It is horribly wrong I know, but don't you think it is—a little disappointing? One expects so much and finds so little. It is like going to a grand concert or an oratorio—very nice at first, but dreadfully fatiguing and monotonous at the finish. If only one need not always be on one's best behaviour," she continued. "The devil gets into me often and whispers: 'Do something outrageous,' and then I long to shock everybody. Some day I shall succeed in doing so and then, Constance, can't you picture Gerald's face? Don't you know exactly how he would look, and the funny little proper expression that would come round the corners of his mouth? 'My dear Daphne, you forget that you are a married woman now,'" she said, mimicking Gerald's tone with an accuracy positively startling.

Constance sighed, and then she took the sweet child-face between her hands and drew it down to hers.

"Don't you love your husband, Daphne?"

"Define love first," cried the girl, "and then I will answer your question. What is love? A sentiment, an emotion, as evanescent as the breath we draw, something that is both pleasure and pain, an

unnamed desire, born of the senses, defying reason and wisdom."

"That is not my idea of love," said Constance. "I look upon love as the exquisite accord of two hearts that beat in unison, their thoughts and aspirations intermingled, the one divine thing in humanity — God-given, heaven-sent."

Daphne leaned both elbows on her sister-in-law's lap and, with her dimpled chin resting on her hollow palms, looked demurely up into Constance's face.

"And is that what you felt for Cyril?" she asked. "What a happy woman you must have been, Constance!"

And whether she spoke mockingly from a wish to turn the tables on her mentor or purely in ignorance, Mrs. Armitage could not determine.

"After all," said Daphne to herself that same evening, as she fastened a spray of roses at her slender throat, "I begin to suspect that Constance has a regard for Mr. St. Quentin, whatever he may have for her. I think I shall watch her." The fact of knowing that her brother-in-law had discussed the point with his wife made Mrs. Armitage nervous and self-conscious and destroyed all the pleasure she would otherwise have felt in Mr. St. Quentin's society.

And instinctively the young man became aware that she avoided him, and he felt hurt and wounded. Constance was associated with the holiest and best part of his nature. She was one of the women by whom men are redeemed—who unconsciously raise them above the common herd. Not even to himself had he dared to say that he loved her. That she had been thoroughly unhappy in her married life with Armitage he could not but know, and there had been a mutual understanding between them, begotten of common sympathies, similarity of tastes, and unity of opinion; but now the bond was strengthened. He told himself that it was a mere question of time, and that he could afford to wait. It never even entered his head that his pretty little hostess could for a moment construe his attentions into anything approaching an attachment for herself. He would have laughed prodigiously at the notion.

It was natural to him to drop his voice with a caressing intonation when he spoke to a woman, and, like many other men, he had a trick of holding slim white fingers a second or two longer than occasion absolutely demanded. Another fault of his was that his dark, handsome eyes seemed

to tell a tale that of a surety his lips would never have uttered. With a conscience guiltless of all wish to attract the empty-headed little butterfly, it never occurred to him that lookers-on might put a different interpretation upon his actions. But as the days passed by, and brought the young man constantly to the Faubourg St. Germain, Constance began to have an uneasy consciousness of trouble ahead, and to look forward with a sinking heart to his next visit. And the colder and more distant her manner became, the more he was thrown on Daphne's good nature and amiability, until at length Mr Armitage had a word or two to say on the subject.

"What brings that young man here so often?" he one day asked his wife. Daphne turned upon him a surprised, innocent look.

"Why you yourself told me that he wanted to marry Constance."

"Does she want to marry him? Because, if not, I don't care to have him everlastingly about the place."

"Upon my word your courtesy is only equalled by your hospitality," cried Daphne, much nettled. "Goodness knows I have had a dull enough life, without losing the only friend I have."

“Are you referring to Mr. St. Quentin?” asked her husband.

The extreme frigidity of his tone brought Daphne to her senses.

“I might as well be a nun at once,” she cried with flashing eyes and crimson cheeks. “I believe you would like to keep me under lock and key.”

“My dear little child, I should be quite capable of even that enormity if I saw good cause for it.”

And after that Daphne said no more. Indeed she felt herself entirely worsted. But Gerald Armitage had made the greatest mistake of his life in raising a feeling of fear in his wife's bosom. She was so young that if he had taught her to love him he might have done anything he liked with her, but when he began to threaten, he roused a feeling of rebellion within her that was very hard to allay, and thus turned a dangerous weapon against himself.

## CHAPTER XII.

CONSTANCE was both surprised and vexed when, coming in from a drive in the Bois, she found Lord Hardstock quietly seated in the *salon* engaged in conversing with her brother-in-law.

"Hast thou found me, oh my enemy?" was in her heart, but she somehow managed to force the conventional greeting.

"And what has brought you here?" she asked, when the door shut upon her brother-in-law,

"A steamer and a couple of trains," he replied, airily. "Did you imagine that I had come by balloon?"

"You must know what I mean," answered Constance. Never before had she allowed her temper so far to get the better of her good breeding, but she was literally quivering with indignation. Lord Hardstock pulled his chair closer to hers, and then asked a somewhat irrelevant question.

"How long is it since you heard from home?" said he.

Mrs. Armitage turned pale.

"Is anything wrong?" she asked,

quickly. "For pity's sake, tell me. Is it Eva?"

"Compose yourself. You have no need to be alarmed. Your little girl has scarlatina—a mild attack, and is doing well. Miss Baillie is with her night and day. Knowing how worried you would be I would not let them write to you about it. I saw Dr. Dale, the physician, who was called in, the last thing before I left town, and have since received a line from him which will, I am sure, allay your fears."

"And you came here purposely for this—to break the news to me?"

"I did."

Mrs. Armitage felt rebuked for her impatience towards this man who in every untoward event in her life seemed fated to stand between herself and harm. She could not help wondering why it was that she could not bring herself to like him better. But there was real warmth in her manner and genuine gratitude in her tone as she stretched out her hand to him.

"I thank you," she said, simply.

Lord Hardstock stooped his head and pressed a light kiss on the slender fingers, but as he was in the act the door opened, and Daphne's eyes rested on them both. Mrs. Armitage snatched her hand away, and, terribly embarrassed, proceeded to



present her visitor to her sister-in-law, but there was a curious look of mischief in Daphne's eyes as she apologised for her intrusion.

"I had no idea that Lord Hardstock was here," she said, with a swift glance at Constance's distressed face. "I supposed it was only Mr. St. Quentin."

Lord Hardstock started. So St. Quentin was a visitor here. He felt that he had not come a day too soon, and he began to think that it was quite providential the child should have fallen sick and given him such an excellent excuse for a visit to Paris.

When Mr and Mrs. Armitage heard of the wish to save Constance a shock which had brought him thither, they were loud in their praises of Lord Hardstock's forethought and kindness.

"You are to be congratulated on your friends," remarked Gerald, a trifle drily. And Constance was unable to make any reply.

But, despite the encouraging letter which Dr. Dale had sent, Constance felt that she could not be happy away from her darling, and determined to return home at once, and Lord Hardstock was delighted at the happy accident that permitted him to be her escort.

Somewhat grieved at Mrs. Armitage's

avoidance of him, Basil St. Quentin allowed a day or two to pass by before he again called at the Faubourg St. Germain, and he was amazed and mortified to discover that Constance had gone back to London. "She might at least have sent me word," he said to himself.

As a matter of fact Constance had done so and had given Daphne a letter to post, but that far-seeing young woman had judged it wiser to retain it, telling herself that she would deliver it to Mr. St. Quentin personally when he called, as he was sure to do if kept in ignorance of her sister-in-law's departure.

Now Daphne forthwith forgot all about the letter until three weeks after, when she drew it from her pocket, soiled and crumpled, and then without the faintest scruple tore it into shreds. She came to the conclusion that it was too late to forward it to its rightful owner and, after all, it could scarcely have been of much consequence.

With mingled feelings of vexation and pain St. Quentin learned that Lord Hardstock had accompanied Mrs. Armitage to London. "Surely that was unnecessary," he reflected. "If Eva was ill and her mother felt that she could not trust her to anyone's nursing but her own, it was only

natural that she should bring her visit to an abrupt termination, but she might have arranged matters so that Lord Hardstock did not leave Paris at the same time." The more he thought over the matter, the more angry he became.

"Do you know Lord Hardstock?" asked Daphne, all smiles and coquetries, and it must be confessed well pleased to have the field to herself.

"Yes; I know him."

"Is he not delightful?"

"I daresay some people think so," answered St. Quentin, sulkily. "For my part I must admit that he is not a favourite of mine."

"Mr. St. Quentin is jealous," reflected the vain girl. "He does not like me to sing Lord Hardstock's praises." Then she added in a tone of conviction that put the finishing stroke to St. Quentin's ill-humour:

"Isn't he of Constance's dearest friends?"

"Mrs. Armitage is unfortunately one of those persons who lack the courage to let a man see when his attentions are unwelcome," said St. Quentin. "The more she disliked a person, the greater would be the pains she would take to hide it from him."

Daphne laughed. "But I happen to

know," she said, impressively, "that Constance has a very warm corner in her heart for Lord Hardstock." And she pursed up her rosy lips and looked wondrous wise. "I suppose I ought not to say a word to anybody; but after all nobody asked me not to tell, and it can't do any harm, for you don't count. We are such good friends, are we not?"

St. Quentin was on tenter hooks, but ten seconds later would gladly have gone back to a troubled uncertainty rather than have heard Daphne's much elaborated story of what she had seen and heard.

"I felt so much in the way, really I hardly knew what to do. They both looked so foolish, but really how was I to suppose anything of that sort was going on?"

"No, indeed. How could you possibly guess?" St. Quentin laughed aloud, but he felt that it was impossible to pursue the subject further and rose at once to make his adieux.

"Oh! you are not going?"

"I am afraid I must. I am very sorry" The young man tried to infuse a modicum of regret into his tone, but his attempt did not altogether deceive his listener.

She looked down and said: "You will come and see me still? I am so lonely—always."

She was very pretty. Her limpid eyes shone with something very like tears and she put forth a little warm trembling hand that seemed lost in his huge fist. St. Quentin pulled himself together with something like a start. It is curious how the baser part of a man's nature gets the better of him at times.

"You are very good," he said; "yes, I will come again." And then he dropped the clinging fingers and got himself away in hot haste. But it was not with the alluring little Circe his thoughts were busied as he strode along, but with a woman whom he had fondly believed to be above and beyond the petty meannesses of her sex, and who had stooped to deceive him, and had thrown dust in his eyes by affecting a repugnance to the man whom she permitted to caress her. It was positively sickening, he thought. Was there no such thing as honesty and sincerity in a woman? Were they all alike, and had Constance Armitage her price in common with the rest of her sex? Lord Hardstock was rich; and she who had once enjoyed every luxury that money could purchase, might well be forgiven if she looked back with longing eyes on the flesh-pots of Egypt. And thus the man who professed to love poor Constance cruelly wronged her in his heart.

Nothing could exceed Lord Hardstock's delicacy and tact on their *tête-à-tête* journey. Without inflicting his companionship on her when Constance wanted to be alone, he yet contrived to be within hail whenever he was required. He felt that he could afford to play a waiting game now that he had trumped his enemy's card. And when the train steamed slowly into Charing Cross Station and he proposed putting Mrs. Armitage into a hansom that she might lose no time in getting home, he gained his reward, for in some little surprise she looked up at him: "Are you not coming with me?" she asked.

Of course it would have been more diplomatic to have declined, but that was a sacrifice Lord Hardstock felt to be beyond him, and so without more ado he took his seat beside her, radiant and jubilant.

"I could scarcely do less," Constance told herself. "After his extreme kindness and attention it would have been most ungracious to have acted otherwise." When she found Mrs. Strangways waiting for her in her little drawing-room, with a cosy meal all ready prepared, she felt that she had made a mistake, for Rebecca bestowed the warmest of welcomes upon Lord Hardstock, and with a quick glance

Constance noticed that the table was laid for three. And by-and-bye she began to see that she had been unnecessarily alarmed, for Eva seemed much the same as usual, and the attack had been a very slight one. Miss Baillie was in attendance and looked worn and pale.

"I have been very anxious," said that lady simply, when Mrs. Armitage commented on her looks, "but all is going on well and I cannot be sufficiently thankful."

"How good you have been!" cried Constance, with glistening eyes. "My darling, what can we do to show our gratitude to kind Miss Baillie?" she asked Eva.

"Yes, I have been an awful nuisance," remarked the little invalid, naïvely. "I heard her say so. Oh, mother, I have such a big doctor, ever so nice. You will see him to-morrow"

"And who is he?" asked Constance. "Did you send for him, Miss Baillie?"

"I did," answered that lady. "I happened to have noticed his name on the door when we were out walking, and, not knowing who your own medical man was, I sent for him."

"You acted quite rightly. Is he a clever man?"

"I think so. Eva has become quite

attached to him. Dear Mrs. Armitage, I am sure you must want some tea. Do go down now, and I will get my little patient to sleep." And so Constance went softly away, congratulating herself for the twentieth time that she had such a treasure as Miss Baillie to rely upon.

It was late when Lord Hardstock left West Kensington. He had lingered a few minutes after Mrs. Strangways had gone, and Constance again expressed her gratitude for the trouble he had taken on her behalf. He shut the hall door, and when he was a few paces from the house he paused to light his cigar. As he did so, a gentle touch fell on his arm, and a sweet voice at his elbow whispered :

"Forgive me. I could not have slept if I had not seen you for a second."

"Emily, what madness!" He spoke angrily—she had taken him so much by surprise. Wrapped up in the thought of Constance he had forgotten her very existence, and it came upon him as an unpleasant reminder.

"Oh, don't scold me, darling," she said. "One word of love and I will go."

She was covered from head to foot in a long cloak, the hood of which fell back on her shoulders, and she lifted her beautiful face pleadingly.



"Foolish child," he cried, trying to speak lightly, but in a very panic of fear lest there should be a spectator of the annoying scene. The street was deserted—not a soul was to be seen from one end of it to the other.

"You will come again soon — very soon?"

"Yes, yes, I promise. Run back, little one; you should not have risked this."

"I would do more than that for a caress. I get so few now," she whispered, her lips very close to his. And then he stooped and kissed her once, twice, thrice, and so sent her back happy and comforted.

## CHAPTER XIII.

Two days after Mrs. Armitage returned home, Miss Baillie took the scarlatina and became seriously ill. Standing bare-headed in the chill night air, after passing so many hours in a heated atmosphere, may have had something to do with it, but no one suspected her of such imprudence.

Dr. Dale was called in and professed himself anxious about her condition. He was a remarkably handsome man, considerably above the medium height, with the most beautiful eyes that Constance thought she had ever seen in her life. They were a curious shade of grey which became almost black when looked at in some lights, with immense pupils and extremely long lashes. The first question he put to Mrs. Armitage took her somewhat by surprise.

“I am afraid your governess is going to be seriously ill,” he said. “Has she friends by whom she could be nursed?”

“After her devotion to my little girl, the very least I can do for her is to nurse her here.”

Dr. Dale smiled—and a very strange

smile it was—but said no more. It is a way with some doctors.

Miss Baillie was a most difficult patient—restless, irritable, and unwilling to believe that she was really ill at all. At the end of the second day Constance abandoned the idea of nursing herself, and Mrs. Strangways sent her own special factotum, by name Dyne, to take her place.

Dyne was quite a character in her way. She was a tiny little woman somewhere about fifty years of age, but looking at least ten years older, with a skin like parchment, withered and yellow, keen black eyes, and a mouth pursed up into a button-hole. Like most of her class, she was much given to fault-finding, and despotic to the last degree, yet she possessed a warm and kindly heart, and would have given her life for anyone who found favour with her. And all this unconsciously Constance had done.

“Bless her sweet face! They won’t easy find her match,” the old woman muttered as she took her place by the bedside. “Always thinking of others. Now what must she be like, I am wondering?” she continued, as she took a long, steady survey of Emily Baillie as the invalid lay asleep.

But no one was the wiser for the conclusion she might have formed on the

subject, for she did not speak again. It was, however, no secret in the household as time went on that Mrs. Dyne had not fallen in love with her patient.

"Beautiful she may be," she remarked to the cook; "I am not denying that she is. But then you see there's two sorts of beauty, just as there's two sorts of angels, and I haven't quite made up my mind as to which sort she belongs to."

For several days Miss Baillie was in a dangerous condition, but at last she took a turn for the better, and very slowly began to mend. Convalescence is always more trying to an invalid than actual suffering. It is only as strength comes back that we realise how weak we are, and Miss Baillie was no exception to the general rule. She was perverse, ungracious and even cross to old Dyne, whom she secretly abhorred. But there was one person who always found her charming and delightful. Dr. Dale was fast losing his heart. He really thought that Mrs. Armitage's governess was the sweetest woman he had ever seen, and Miss Baillie would not have been a true daughter of Eve if she had not been fully aware of the fact. She smiled her brightest and lifted her beautiful eyes with a world of coquetry in their gaze to his, but never for a single instant did she swerve

from her allegiance to the man who had scarcely even troubled to ask after her well-being. All the heart that Emily Baillie would ever give to any man, she had surrendered into his keeping, and she had not the faintest suspicion that Lord Hardstock was playing her false.

One evening Dr. Dale paid a late visit. He had been detained in the country all day and was unwilling to go home without the certainty that all was progressing favourably with his interesting patient.

"Oh, sir, I am so glad you have come," said the maid who opened the door to him. "We were just going to send round."

"Why, what is amiss?"

But almost before the words were uttered a woman's piercing scream rang through the house, a door on the upper landing opened hastily, and Nurse Dyne's forbidding face looked down on them.

"You'd best come up," she said, angrily. "A pretty job I've had."

Dr. Dale was, in American parlance, up those stairs in a streak of lightning. "What is it? Hysterics?"

"No, tantrums. She has just laid there and yelled until I am fair deafened."

Miss Baillie was crouched in a large easy chair silent for the moment, but as the doctor approached her she burst anew into

sobs and shrieks, her body writhing, her hands and limbs working convulsively.

“What have you done for her?”

Dyne turned on him like a tigress. “She may thank her lucky stars that she’s only just got over the fever, or I’d have doused her with a pail of cold water that would have brought her to her senses.”

Dr. Dale pointed to the door sternly. “Leave the room,” he said. “You are not fit to have the charge of an hysterical patient until you have learned to control your own passions.”

Dyne would like to have rebelled, but as she afterwards said: “There is something creepy like about the doctor. I can’t exactly give it a name, but something as makes you feel you dursn’t go against him.” And she moved slowly across the room and stood outside the door.

“Get up,” said Dr. Dale, putting his hand lightly on Miss Baillie’s shoulder.

She neither stirred nor spoke, but he could feel her quiver beneath his touch.

“Get up,” he said, firmly, and she lifted her face white and tear-stained for a second, only to drop back again crying and sobbing.

He then raised her to her feet, trembling in every limb.

“Try and stand,” he said.

“ I can’t—I can’t.”

“ Yes you can. It is the effort only that is wanting.”

She tried to obey, but she was terribly weak and sank back half fainting. He lifted her in his arms and laid her on the bed.

“ Poor child,” he said, gently. Presently he went to the door and opened it. “ Mrs. Dyne,” said he, “ be so good as to undress Miss Baillie. I will be back again in a few minutes. He spoke as if nothing had occurred and Dyne was only too pleased to note his demeanour. With gentle hands she began to undress the almost unconscious girl and then set to work to put everything ship-shape before the doctor returned. Not a chair was out of place and there was no litter anywhere. Dyne prided herself on her sick-room being the very pink of perfection.

Suddenly Miss Baillie started up in bed laughing wildly and flinging her arms above her head. To remonstrances and arguments she was alike deaf. Peal followed peal of hysterical laughter, while the tears coursed down her cheeks. In the midst of it all Mr. Dale came in. He walked straight to the bed, forced the sobbing girl back upon the pillows and held her there, fixing his eyes upon her, and

holding his breath. She shivered and shrank, cowered like a leaf, and then she lay still—conquered. His grasp relaxed, and he turned his eyes away from her for an instant, and in that second her eyes closed, the eyelids fell over them, and a faint sigh parted her lips. She was asleep. For fully an hour Dr. Dale sat motionless, his arms folded ; at last he rose.

“Good-night, Mrs. Dyne,” he said, quietly. “I shall be here early to-morrow morning. The patient won’t wake before then.”

“Lord love you, sir, she’ll be that restless and fidgety the whole of the blessed night. She always is.”

“Not to-night, Mrs. Dyne. Take my word for it she will not move as much as a finger. You may go to sleep yourself with a safe conscience.”

And although Dyne shook her head and pursed up her mouth with an air of superiority, Dr. Dale proved to be right, for Emily Baillie slept as peacefully as a baby and was still slumbering when the doctor paid his first visit. He took the small hand in his and counted her pulse, then laid her arm gently back upon the coverlet.

“Mrs. Dyne, will you fetch me a tumbler and a tea-spoon?” he said.



"A tea-spoon is here, sir, but a tumbler—well now, that careless housemaid has not taken away the dirty ones. I won't keep you a minute, sir."

It was little more than a minute he wanted. He stooped over the quiet form on the bed and laid a finger on each eyelid with a gentle pressure. "Wake up," he said loudly. The colour came faintly to her face and with a sigh she woke.

"You!" she said, looking up at him mistily. "I was dreaming of you."

A puzzled expression came over her face, and she turned on her pillow with a frown. Clearly her dreams had not been to her liking.

At this juncture the grim Dyne made her appearance with a tumbler. The doctor took it and dropped some colourless liquid into it from a phial in his pocket and then he filled it up with water.

"Drink this," said he, "and you will feel a thousand times better."

She obeyed without a word, and then closed her eyes.

"I shall call in again about four o'clock. Keep her very quiet. Recollect that she is not to get up. And you had better darken the room."

Dr. Dale found Mrs. Armitage waiting for him when he reached the hall.

"Is she very ill?" she asked, looking pale and harassed.

"Not now. She has been suffering from excessive weakness which naturally followed the fever, but I think I may promise that she will now make steady progress towards recovery, and be downstairs again very shortly."

"Oh, I am relieved. I really was quite frightened."

"Perhaps you are not an hysterical subject yourself, Mrs. Armitage?"

"No, I am thankful to say I am not," she said.

"What a contrast between the two types of woman," said Dr. Dale to himself, as he walked thoughtfully down the street. "The one so calm and dignified and restful—the other a bundle of nerves, and yet——" He broke off and sighed impatiently

## CHAPTER XIV.

FROM that day Dr. Dale acquired an influence over Emily Baillie that puzzled as much as it vexed and annoyed her. She was uneasy in his presence, and though she avoided meeting his glance she could feel his eyes looking into hers and filling her with subtle fancies. When he was gone she breathed freely. The girl was too much in love with Lord Hardstock to have room in her heart for any other wooer. What then was the strange power that held her spell-bound in his presence, that made her long for him when he was gone and shrink abashed when he approached her? She asked herself this a thousand times, but was unable to give any satisfactory reply. What is poor human nature, after all, but a combination of senses and feelings, purely physical, developed and matured by our surroundings?

“I am afraid Miss Baillie will not be strong for some time,” said Mrs. Armitage to Dyne, who although no longer in attendance on the governess was remaining at West Kensington during the absence from town of Mrs. Strangways. “She

has lost her pretty colour," continued Constance, "and looks quite different since her illness."

"I only hope you may not find yourself deceived in her, ma'am. It is not for the likes of me to speak, I knows that; but she's not much good to anybody I'm thinking."

Constance looked distressed. It was not her way to gush over anybody, and beyond a certain admiration of Miss Baillie's charms of person and manner, she had no great affection for her, but she could not forget how the governess had devoted herself to Eva, and nursed her faithfully, and had paid the penalty by falling ill herself.

"Oh, Dyne, I don't like to hear you talk in such a strain," she said, in tones of rebuke. "Why should you speak ill of her, poor girl?" Dyne muttered something under her breath that sounded like "humbug."

"She is not that," said Constance, earnestly, "and so long as she performs her duty as nobly and well as she has hitherto done, I must refuse to listen to anything you may have to say against her."

"Well, I only hope you may not find it out for yourself, ma'am," snapped Dyne, determined to have the last word.

Emily Baillie was very unhappy. Five long weeks had she spent in her sick-room, and no single word had reached her through all that weary time from the man who had promised to marry her. Surely he might have found some means of communicating with her. She knew he came sometimes to see Mrs. Armitage, and once she had heard his voice in the hall speaking to Eva, and in a very agony of suspense and longing she had dragged herself to the door that she might get a glimpse of his dear face. But apparently he had forgotten her very existence.

“When shall I be well enough to go and see him?” she asked herself, peevishly. “It is no use my writing to him; he would be afraid to risk sending me a reply, and I have no other way of getting it. I sometimes wish I had never come here. I was much happier in the old life.” And she fretted and worried herself to such an extent that Dr. Dale asked her point blank if she had any mental trouble, or if she could tell him what it was that was keeping her back from recovery.

“I suppose everybody gets the blues sometimes,” she said, evasively. “I am restless and eager to be myself again, I think. I never remember being ill before,

and it is an experiment I shall not care to repeat."

"You have not always been a governess?"

"No, never until I came here. I do not think I shall remain long."

Dr. Dale hesitated. If he had ever doubted what his feelings for Miss Baillie actually were he could do so no longer. What had been but a spark now sprang to flame within him, and he knew that there would be neither peace nor rest for him henceforth. He could not let her go from him and he fixed his eyes full of passionate love upon her, while he sought for words in which to confess his secret. Suddenly Miss Baillie rose from her seat and threw up her hands with an appealing and deprecating gesture.

"Don't," she said. "I can't bear it," and so sank back shivering. This masterful mesmerism was to her simple torture. In a moment or two he was at her side.

"Forgive me," he said. "God knows I love you too well to give you a moment's uneasiness."

"You love me?" she answered, her face alight with a strange weird light. Standing in the pillory of her own past life, seeing herself the accursed thing she was, fallen from the pedestal of true pure womanhood, they seemed strange words—strange and

incomprehensible. Mechanically she repeated them.

"Yes, dearest one, I love you. I am a poor man, struggling to make a living, but if you will give yourself to me you shall never regret it. All that a man can do to make a woman's life bright and beautiful, that will I do."

Miss Baillie's eyes filled with tears, and seeing them, Dr. Dale's heart sank. "There is someone else," he said, abruptly.

"Yes."

"I ought to have known it." But the blow was none the less a heavy one. "You will not let this make any difference between us?" he said, by-and-bye. "You will let me be your friend—always?"

"Always, I hope."

"Sit down." He pulled a chair forward, and taking her hand in his, said: "I want you to know my sister. She is about your own age. I am sure you would like her. Will you come and see her some afternoon?"

Emily accepted the invitation. But she was vexed that matters should have precipitated themselves. Dr. Dale, as an admirer, might be tolerated, but anything else was out of the question.

Whatever faults Miss Baillie had she was at all events both loyal and constant. She liked this man a little, and she feared him

a great deal. She rebelled against the influence he had over her, and at the same time was drawn to, and attracted, by him. She did not pause to analyse her feelings, but she felt that he was her master, and she would have set him at defiance if she had dared to do so. He had said that he loved her—the pitiful, faulty, erring woman she knew herself to be. And her face worked curiously and a softened expression came over it. He loved her and wished to make her his wife. He had faith in her, believed in her virtue and purity. “Heaven be thanked there is no one to tell him what I am,” she whispered, with dry lips.

Two days later she stole from the house unnoticed and unseen. The suspense and misery was more than she could bear. She must at all hazards see Lord Hardstock, and she considerably startled that nobleman, who had been informed only an hour or two before by Mrs. Armitage that Miss Baillie was not downstairs yet.

What a sad little face it was! The curving lips drooping and the big mournful eyes bigger than ever. Before Lord Hardstock had time to realise that she was there, she had flung herself wildly into his arms and was sobbing on his bosom.

“Oh, do not send me away again. I cannot live without you.”



"What an infernal nuisance these emotional women are," thought Lord Hardstock, as he pressed a careless kiss on her forehead. But one might as well have expected peace and quietness in Emily Baillie as calm and equanimity in an earthquake.

"My poor child, you are weak still."

"No, not now—not now, when your arms are round me. I have wanted you so much. Rupert, I began to think that your love for me was growing less. Look at me—speak. Tell me that I am the one woman in the world for you, and that you love me and me only still."

Lord Hardstock began to wonder, as he held her in his arms, how much she suspected or knew. He felt that it would be worse than folly to argue with her. She was very fond of him, and although he did not love her, still she was a beautiful woman, and she was his. Her heart pulsed swiftly back to every throb of his, and her clinging arms, and warm breath, and the scent of a flower at her throat affected him powerfully. She was all woman now, tempting, maddening and alluring. He knew that the secret of her life was his secret too, and the baseness of desire shook him as he looked down on her.

A wise man has told us that there are depths in a man that go to the lengths of

lowest hell, and there are heights that reach to highest heaven, for both heaven and hell are made out of him, made by him, everlasting miracle of mystery that he is.

An hour later they still sat facing each other, the man bored and listless, the woman with an air of happy content to which she had so long been a stranger.

Suddenly Emily broke the silence. "I have had an offer of marriage," she said.

"You?" So startled was her companion that only by an effort could he restrain himself from speaking words that must have opened her eyes to the actual state of affairs between them.

"Yes—I," she answered, nodding her head. "Is it very wonderful?"

"And what did you say, Emily?"

"I said I had already given my promise."

"You did not mention my name, I hope? You could never have been so rash as to have done that."

"There is no need to worry yourself. I merely mentioned the fact that I was already engaged."

"What sort of man is he?"

"He is a very handsome man, but as poor as a church mouse," she answered, shrugging her shoulders discontentedly.

"What is his name?"

"Dr. Dale Are you jealous, dear?"

Lord Hardstock laughed, but it was not a pleasant laugh to listen to. "You might do worse, Emily!" he said.

"Yes, I dare say I might. But I am going to do a very great deal better. Oh, Rupert, how much longer am I to wait? I shall run away some day and then you will have to marry me."

His brow darkened. "If you were so utterly indifferent to your own good name and character," he said, coldly, "you could hardly expect me to be more considerate."

"Then you would refuse to make me your wife?"

"Most assuredly I should."

She grew very pale. "I was but in jest," she said. "I will do all you wish. Only remember that I am very unhappy away from you, and I can know no happiness until——" Her voice broke down and she turned away.

Perhaps his heart smote him a little, and after she was gone he told himself angrily that he was in a mess, and that if he was not careful she would ruin everything with her restless impetuosity.

"There is no such thing as a happy medium in a woman," he said to himself, savagely. "Either they are as cold as ice and as unapproachable as polar bears, or they are demons of passion, and tear and destroy everything before them."

## CHAPTER XV

A MAN and a woman rarely agree as to the merits of another woman, and despite the fact that Janet Dale and her brother were of one mind about most things they fell out over Emily Baillie.

Perhaps Janet declined to be hoodwinked, and putting two and two together arrived at a conclusion not far from the actual truth.

It must not be supposed that Dr. Dale had lived to thirty years of age without any kind of love experience. But until now Janet had been his confidante, and into her sympathetic ears he had poured all his hopes and fears. Now for the first time she found herself left out in the cold, and it was not a pleasant sensation. Feeling her ground cautiously, she came to the conclusion that her brother had not as yet actually committed himself, but that things were in abeyance, and that it rested in a great measure with herself to keep them so.

To do Janet justice she would never have allowed her own personal likes and dislikes to have swayed her in the matter if she could have brought herself to believe

that a union with Miss Baillie would be conducive to the future happiness of her brother, but she did not believe it. She was a shrewd, clever girl and had gauged Emily at her right worth. "She shall not play fast and loose with my brother," she told herself resolutely.

"Don't you think her very beautiful, Janet?" Brother and sister were seated at the breakfast table the morning after Miss Baillie's visit.

"Yes, she is certainly a lovely woman, but I don't like her. There is something hollow and artificial about her."

"I am very disappointed. I wanted you two girls to be friends."

"Why?" asked Janet, bluntly.

Dr. Dale looked into his teacup with an air of embarrassment that was not lost upon his sister.

"Her life is a lonely one. She is out of her element in that house altogether"

"I can well believe that," said Janet, speaking in a dry tone that grated on her brother's ear. She had met Mrs. Armitage once in the street, and little Eva who had hold of her mother's hand, ran impulsively up to Dr. Dale; and then Mrs. Armitage had paused, and the ladies were presented to each other. Finding that they were going in the same direction they walked

side by side, and although Janet was only ten minutes in Mrs. Armitage's company, she had been much struck with her gentle dignity and sweetness. And she felt certain that Emily Baillie was cast in another mould.

"I thought," continued Dr. Dale, "that you would have had tastes and pursuits in common."

"Then you were never more mistaken in your life. I doubt if we should agree upon a single subject. I am sorry you asked her to come again."

"And so am I if you have made up your mind to dislike her," said Dr. Dale, pushing his chair back and rising from his scarcely-tasted breakfast.

Janet could not keep back the tears that welled up in her eyes. "To think," she said, "that we should fall out over such an absurdity. It is too ridiculous. He has had nothing to eat, and he will be out until half-past one. It is too bad, indeed it is too bad."

Emily's first visit to Dr. Dale's sister was not a propitious one.

"Have I your permission to receive a visitor?" asked Miss Baillie a day or two later.

"Certainly," replied Mrs. Armitage and then she hesitated. It was always difficult

for her to find words in which to express herself. "I so much wish," she added kindly, "that I could make you feel more at home. I see that you are not happy and it troubles me. Your goodness to my darling and your long illness should have drawn us closer together. Will you not tell me how I can repay a little of the debt I owe you?"

Emily was mute. She felt herself an arrant humbug—a living lie, and she hated herself for her duplicity, and yet she knew that she was in the toils and that she must wear the mask a little longer. She could not say, "I am unworthy of your interest in me. I have been deceiving you from the first. Mine has been a shameful past, and I am not even of gentle birth as you imagine." She reflected that she had obtained her situation through Lord Hardstock's instrumentality, and in exposing herself she must also accuse him.

"Indeed you have always been most kind to me," she said at length, "and I am feeling quite well enough to return to my duties again, and should be happier, I think, if you would allow me to do so."

"I am afraid of your overtaking your strength, but you shall do as you like in the matter. When will your friend be coming to visit you? I ask, because I will

arrange that you shall have the drawing-room to yourselves."

"Thank you, that will be quite unnecessary. It is only Miss Dale, the doctor's sister, who is likely to come and see me. I called there the other day and she will probably return my visit."

And now Constance felt that she could read between the lines, and her heart beat with genuine delight. So the young people had fallen in love with each other. They would make a charming couple. And this, then, was the secret of the doctor's untiring interest and zeal in his case.

"I have met Miss Dale once," said Constance, "and I thought her a remarkably intelligent and pleasant girl."

"I cannot say I thought so. She struck me as being not only stupid but sullen."

"Perhaps Miss Janet does not relish the notion of a sister-in-law," thought Constance, somewhat puzzled to account for the irritability in Miss Baillie's manner and the ill-concealed venom in her tone. "She is not nearly so handsome as her brother," she remarked.

"In my opinion she is a fright. I do not know that I consider Dr. Dale a good-looking man — indeed, beyond the



fact that he has beautiful eyes there is nothing remarkable about him one way or the other, but he is a gentleman, and always courteous and polite."

"Yes, indeed he is. I liked him from the first, and as for Eva, he has quite won her heart. A man who will go out of his way to give pleasure to little children must have a kindly nature. He will make some lucky woman a very good husband."

"Don't you think there are other qualities requisite?" asked Emily, with an air of amusement. She saw the error into which Constance had fallen and was bent on disabusing her mind. "Let me see. First he must be rich, or at all events well-to-do and able to keep his wife in comfort, and that I am persuaded is out of poor Dr. Dale's power."

Down went Constance's castles in the air. There was no mistaking the sincerity with which Miss Baillie aired her sentiments. If she had been ever so little interested in him she could never have spoken thus.

"There must also be a good deal of love," said Mrs. Armitage. "Money is not everything, although I grant it is a concomitant to happiness."

"I should think it was," cried Miss Baillie, shrugging her shoulders. "As

far as I can judge it is the very basis of conjugal felicity. It is all very well to talk of love and affection, but when the money takes wings to itself, as the proverb says, they will follow very quickly."

"What shall we have for to eat, eat, eat?"

Will the love that you're so rich in

Light a fire in the kitchen,

Or the little God of Love turn the spit, spit, spit?"

"Oh! is it a story?" cried a voice at the door. "Oh, Miss Baillie, are you well enough to tell stories again?"

Emily laughed. "Come here," she said, "and I will tell you about a beautiful lady who had two suitors for her hand. Now one of them was as ugly as an ogre but he was rich, and the other was as handsome as Adonis but he had no money. Which do you think she chose?"

Eva looked uncertain. "The handsome one," she risked.

"No, the rich one."

"Oh, and was she happy ever after?"

"Well, you see, the story stops there and so I don't know."

Miss Baillie lifted Eva in her arms and carried her off to the schoolroom, and Mrs. Armitage was left with a faint sensation of uneasiness stirring within her. Somehow Miss Baillie had shown herself in

a new and altogether unfavourable light, and Constance felt a little puzzled.

Miss Dale paid her visit, the conventional time having elapsed before she did so, and Emily with her little charge received her. The governess felt that the child would be a diversion and help to make things go smoothly, for she was perfectly aware that the doctor's sister did not approve of her and indeed was altogether antagonistic, but she was hardly prepared for the tragic result of her manœuvres.

Having commented on that never failing topic—the weather, Miss Dale drew Eva to her side and began questioning her about her amusements and lessons.

“Oh, I don't learn now,” answered the child. “Miss Baillie has been ill, you know, and Dr. Dale cured her. I think he liked doing it.”

“Doctors are always glad when they make sick people well,” said Janet, in the same way as she would have said “A stitch in time saves nine,” or “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.”

“Yes, I know, but my doctor was not glad when she was cured. I heard nurse Dyne say so. Dyne said ‘Miss Baillie's getting well too fast to please some folks. There won't be any pills and physic any more, and there won't be no excuse.’”

“Eva, Miss Dale is not interested in hearing what that atrocious old busy-body had to talk about.”

Janet sat bolt upright in her chair, too incensed to allow herself to speak.

“I don’t think Dyne liked my doctor,” continued Eva, when the silence was becoming too awful, and neither of the girls seemed as if they could break it. “She called him a ‘poor fool of a man,’ and said that anyone with half an eye could see that he would soon be taken in and done for. If——”

“Eva, go to the nursery and wait there until I come.”

Something in Miss Baillie’s tone conveyed to the child’s mind that she was in disgrace, and she looked from one to the other appealingly.

Miss Dale rose with a great deal of dignity.

“Pray do not send the child away,” she said. “I must say good afternoon now.” And barely touching the tips of Emily’s fingers she swept by her to the door.

Miss Baillie stood for several minutes uncertain whether there was more cause for anger or merriment, but the latter conquered, and she laughed aloud.

“You small firebrand! I wonder if you

have any notion of the mischief you have done," said she looking down at Eva, who was clinging to her skirts.

"I don't like her. Do you?" whispered the child.

"We ought to love everybody," answered Emily, with a sudden recollection of her responsibilities as a governess. "It is wrong to dislike people who have done us no harm." All the same she cordially agreed with Eva's sentiments, and in her heart detested the doctor's sister.

"But I think I am even with her," she told herself, triumphantly. "She won't relish the aspect of affairs, and I only hope she won't be enlightened as to the truth of the matter." Nor was she. Janet Dale left West Kensington miserable and crestfallen. If the very servants had begun to gossip about the matter, there was no longer any room for hope.

"Oh, how can men be so blind?" she said to herself. "Because that girl has a pretty face she can do as she likes, and worthier women, nobler and better in every way, must go to the wall unnoticed and unloved. It does seem terribly unfair."

Now there was a certain Mary Mellish, a daughter of a physician in large practice

living in Hampstead, whom Janet had selected from among her friends as a fitting wife for her brother. The young lady in question could not boast of any great amount of beauty, but she had a loving heart and a pair of capable, willing hands. She would make a helpmeet for Dr. Dale in the true sense of the word, and he had spoken warmly in her praise until Miss Baillie with her fatal fascination had crossed his path, and now he had eyes for no other woman.

Dr. Mellish was well advanced in years. It was more than likely that if young Dale became Mary's husband he would be taken into partnership by his father-in-law. To Janet's mind her brother was simply cutting his throat by throwing away such a chance.

"One thing is certain," she told herself. "Miss Baillie shall not make her acquaintance with me a stepping-stone to the furtherance of her machinations, for if she calls again I shall not be at home. I simply refuse to know her."

## CHAPTER XVI.

EARLY in June Constance went to Scarborough.

"I think we shall be all the better for the change," she said to Miss Baillie, "and Scarborough will be less crowded now than later on, and I for one shall enjoy it more. Arthur will not have his holidays until August, so it is no use waiting for him."

Emily, of course, acquiesced, although she would infinitely have preferred to remain in London. However delightful Scarborough might be it could have no charms for her, since she would be separated from Lord Hardstock, and the idea was intolerable to her.

Every month that wore itself away seemed to be widening the gap between them. She saw less and less of him and even in the stolen moments which she snatched now and again, she could not blind herself to the fact that he was not as passionately devoted to her as he had been. She had battled with the world too long to believe implicitly in the vows a man in the position of Lord Hardstock

makes to a girl situated as she was, and yet she could not bring herself to doubt him. He had promised over and over again that he would marry her, and she felt that he could not be so base as to wish to cheat and trick her. She told herself as much with quivering lips and fast-beating heart.

When the day was fixed for their journey to Scarborough she wrote Lord Hardstock a hurried little note, begging him to make an appointment for the following evening, for she had much to say to him before she left London.

With a curl of his lip Lord Hardstock tossed the letter into the fire. Truth to tell he was heartily sick of the whole business, and cursed the hour when he turned his steps towards the Ambassadeurs. The girl was really lovely in her way, and he had been very fond of her once, but that was months ago. His feelings had undergone a considerable modification since then, and now his principal thought was how it would be easiest to get rid of her.

Emily's letter remained unanswered, and Emily herself was in a frantic state of suspense and torture. It was strange that he did not write. Could he have received the letter, or what could have happened?



When the third evening came and still no word from him, she put Eva to bed half-an-hour earlier on the plea of having a bad headache, locked her bed-room door, slipped the key into her pocket, and stole softly downstairs. She would risk finding him, for see him she must. She made her way to the Albany, but Lord Hardstock was not at home. The little dial above his door pointed to the word "Out."

"I will wait," thought Emily, and turned to go down the staircase. Suddenly she paused and hesitated. There was no one in sight. She knew that Lord Hardstock was in the habit of hiding his key underneath the mat. She had more than once seen him take it from there, and he had told her laughingly that it was safer there than in his pocket, and less likely to be lost. In another moment she had it in her hand, swung the door open, laid the key back in its place beneath the mat, and walked in. It was then eight o'clock. Nine struck, and ten, and eleven, and still he did not come.

Emily began to lose courage. But at length her quick ear caught a step, and she flew to the door, but fell back amazed—Lord Hardstock was not alone.

"Come in and have a brandy and soda," he was saying. "Oh nonsense, come in."

Emily shrank back, but the lamp which she had lit an hour ago was burning brightly, and escape was impossible.

There was nothing for it but to face the position boldly and get herself out of an unpleasant scrape as best she might.

"You are surprised to see me," she said, coolly, advancing with outstretched hand, "and you must wonder what has brought me here. But if you will come back with me, my mother will explain. She has important news for you."

"Ah! I ought to have seen Aunt Lydia to-day. It was very careless of me not to have called. Hastings, let me introduce you to my cousin. Miss Lisle—Major Hastings."

Emily bowed graciously, thankful that Lord Hardstock had accepted his cue.

"I had no idea that you would be so late," she continued. "I have been here for hours. It was a lovely evening, and I thought I might as well walk here and deliver my mother's message as write to you."

"It is very late," murmured Lord Hardstock.

His guest took the hint. "I told you I did not want anything, my dear Hardstock, but you would have me come in." He shook hands with Emily, and a minute later could be heard clattering down the stone staircase.

Until his footsteps died away not a word did Lord Hardstock speak, and then he turned to the unfortunate girl with so much anger, and indeed hatred on his face, that instinctively she put out her hands to ward him off.

"It is most unfortunate. I am so sorry," she said.

"Upon my word you must have parted with the last grain of common sense. To come here at this hour of the night and force your way into my rooms. I am disgusted with your shamelessness. You don't suppose that Hastings was taken in by that pretty little story for a single instant, do you? My cousin, and therefore presumably a lady, would never have been permitted to visit a bachelor alone at this hour of the night. I suppose you did not think of that. After all, how should you know how women in my rank of life act?"

"I thought I carried it off very well. I am sure he swallowed it all."

Lord Hardstock laughed noisily. He had been drinking and he had been playing *écarté*, and losing heavily, and was in a vile temper.

"I am about sick of this sort of thing," he said, in a blustering tone. "You are rapidly curing me of any fancy I ever had

for you ; and perhaps it is better that there should be an end put to it once and for ever."

All colour faded from Emily's face, and she stood before the man she loved absolutely voiceless. Lord Hardstock turned away and with great deliberation struck a match to light his cigar.

"May I ask if you intend to return to West Kensington to-night, as it is close on twelve o'clock?"

A sob—half sigh, half-moan, parted her lips, and the next instant she had fallen across his feet senseless. The man was not entirely a brute, and his conscience smote him as he lifted her gently and laid her on the sofa. And when the bright eyes opened and sought his, and the warm arms drew him down to her, he yielded as he had yielded before and would yield again.

"Forgive me, dear," she whispered, and she looked so white and helpless that he had not the heart to say another word.

"You must go home at once," he said, kindly. "But how are you to get in? I suppose nobody knows that you have left the house."

"Put me into a cab," she answered. "I will manage the rest." And only too glad to have the matter arranged without his

intervention, Lord Hardstock hastened to do her bidding.

“Write to tell me how things turn out.”

“I will. Kiss me, Rupert, and call me your own little wife.”

For a second he hesitated, then he took her in his arms, and kissed her twice, thrice, not grudgingly, although in his heart, there was not an iota of real love for her. And then he drew her arm through his and walked out with her to the hansom. He gave the West Kensington address to the driver, but three minutes later Miss Baillie pushed open the little trap-door.

“Drive me to 14, Grafton Road,” she said, “and stop at the surgery door round the corner.” She had determined to throw herself upon Dr Dale’s protection.

Late though it was, a light was burning in the surgery, and when she had paid and dismissed the cab she tapped gently on the window, but as no response came she knocked softly at the door. It opened almost instantly.

“You—good heavens!” cried Dr. Dale. “What has happened?” He followed her into the little room, locked the door, and drew a heavy curtain over it with hands that trembled and shook.

“What on earth am I to say?” thought Emily. “Some sort of explanation must

be given." But while she reflected Dr. Dale flung himself by her side and bowed his head upon his shaking hands.

"What a villain you must think me! I could not help it—I mean, it did not seem to be possible——" Then he broke off abruptly

At first Emily actually believed that he had gone mad, but by-and-bye something of the truth dawned upon her and she snatched at it gratefully—greedily.

"I did not do it with actual intent to bring you into my presence," cried the agitated man. "I hardly believed that my influence was strong enough." And then he pointed to a pile of books on hypnotism and mesmerism. "Most of those writers maintain," said he, "that it is only a question of practice how soon one can compel a subject to abject obedience and a blind submission to our will. Tell me, were not your thoughts concentrated on me, your personality merged as it were in mine, and you no longer a breathing, living, separate being, but forced to think with my mind and see with my eyes?"

"Yes," murmured Emily, "it was so."

"I called you and you came. It is wonderful!"

"And now that I am here at your bidding, how am I to get back again?"

She was thinking how marvellously lucky she had been, and since Dr. Dale believed himself responsible for her mad act of to-night it was he that must get her out of the scrape. So she lay back in her chair smiling sweetly, while the unlucky doctor racked his brains.

"You are sure you do not feel ill?" he asked, anxiously

"I feel languid and sleepy," she answered, with a yawn. And it was little to be wondered at that she should.

"I don't think it would be wise to trust Janet," he hazarded.

"Oh, no," cried Emily, impulsively, "certainly not. Let us think of some other way."

"Have you any idea whether you closed the front door after you?"

"No," answered Emily, shaking her head. "I can remember nothing."

"Well, this will teach me a lesson I shall remember all my life. Never again will I meddle with a science about which I really know nothing." The despair of the doctor's tone was so very comical that the girl could not help laughing. "You have a headache I think you said. Would it be strange if you had come to me for advice and been taken ill here?"

"I am afraid it would seem rather odd."

“What is to be done? Is there no one in the household you could trust?”

At that moment the surgery bell was rung loudly and Emily sprang to her feet in dismay.

“Sit still. There is nothing to be frightened of.”

Dr. Dale went to the door and returned with an air of satisfaction.

“Nothing could have happened more providentially,” he cried. “Mrs. Armitage has sent over for some laudanum. She has had the earache so badly that she has not been to bed at all, and is suffering a great deal of pain. I will give a bottle to Dyne and tell her I will look in myself, and if she will hurry back with it I will follow. Then I will take care that the door is left open.”

So Miss Baillie gained her room in perfect safety, and not a soul suspected she had been absent. For once Dyne had served her a good turn. That uncompromising individual was to be left in charge of the house during Mrs. Armitage’s absence, and had arrived at West Kensington that same afternoon. Constance had had premonitory symptoms of her old enemy, and as the pain grew worse she went upstairs at last to Dyne and begged her to go to the nearest chemist’s and



endeavour to procure a little laudanum. But Dyne had had some experience of rousing up the inmates of a household from their first sleep and had no intention of wasting her time in any such proceeding, so she just walked round the corner of the street into Grafton Road, and seeing a light in the surgery promptly rang the doctor's bell, with what happy result we know. Constance was vexed that Dyne should have fetched the doctor for so trifling an ailment, but he assured her that he was only too happy to be of service to her.

"Thank heaven for small mercies," cried Dr. Dale, when at length he found himself back in his surgery. "What in the world we should have done but for this lucky accident I hardly dare to think. Poor girl, how frightened she was! It has been a curious experience. She must be an extremely sensitive subject I should imagine, otherwise hypnotisation would have been impossible, I feel assured. But interesting as the theory of mesmerism undoubtedly is, I should be positively afraid to dabble further in it after to-night's uncanny work."

Safe between the sheets Miss Baillie laughed softly. "The devil's own luck," she said, "and nothing but a little assistance from his Satanic Majesty would ever

have got me out of an ugly mess to-night.” And when she thought of Dr. Dale, she said: “What fools most men are! I could twist that man round my finger, and I should not hesitate to do so if I thought it advisable.”

## CHAPTER XVII.

It was an exceptionally hot June, and the fresh sea breezes were very enjoyable, but never in her life before had Emily Baillie felt her position so irksome. She could not forget that she was only the governess, and however kind and gracious Mrs. Armitage might be, there was a considerable amount of bitter mixed with the sweets. There were a good many guests in the hotel where they were staying, although it was so early in the season, but Constance held aloof from chance acquaintances, and made no new friends.

"I wonder she doesn't find it dull," grumbled Miss Baillie. "Nothing but that perpetual Spa and the little strip of embroidery she busies herself with the whole time the band plays. Only to conceive that there are women who can content themselves with such a negative existence." And she yawned and flung her arms above her head.

It was nearly six o'clock, and Eva had gone out shopping with her mother, and Emily, having first locked her door, had been solacing herself with a French novel.

It is doubtful whether Constance, whose knowledge of the French language was purely elementary, would have understood the work, but it is very certain that if she had she would never have waded through a dozen of its pages. A heroine who allowed her emotional nature to run away with her common sense, and her greed for unhealthy excitement to override and trample upon every law laid down in the canons of morality and decency, would never have appealed to a woman such as Constance Armitage. She would simply have been disgusted. But Miss Baillie, being of another order of women, could and did sympathise with the unfaithful wife and thought her perfectly justified in casting off the yoke and throwing in her lot with a more congenial companion.

“I am getting tired of respectability. It doesn’t suit me.” A little frown passed across her brow. “What on earth is the good of being a lovely woman if you are never to have the chance of being told so? When I am married to Rupert I will have my revenge. I wonder if that day is ever coming. Why does he not write? He is not treating me fairly. I consented to live for a year in a lady’s family that I might perfect myself in the ways and manners of people in his rank of life before becoming

his wife, but for what I see of fashion or society I might as well have gone into a convent. Not that I am in the least afraid I shall disgrace my position. I am confident that I can hold my own with anyone, and I am a very great deal cleverer and smarter than ever Mrs. Armitage was: I could teach her a lesson or two. In the first place she doesn't know how to make the best of her good looks. Such a dowdy as she is—a touch of rouge would make all the difference. She is too colourless and too insipid. She is one of the women whom men lose their heads for, and go to the devil for, and move Heaven and earth to win, and are heartily sick of in a month. A man wants a spice of Nepaul or caviare in his married life. Even under the most favourable circumstances there must be a good deal of sameness about it."

A vigorous kick on the panel of the door here put a summary stop to the young lady's reflections. It was Eva—radiant, laughing, her hands full of parcels.

"Oh, Miss Baillie, Aunt Becky has come and brought mama's nice gentleman with her." Emily's heart gave a sudden leap; it had become very unruly of late.

"What can you mean, Eva?" she asked, sharply. "What gentleman?"

“His lordship,” answered Eva, curtseying gravely, and mimicing to a nicety old Dyne’s voice and manner when speaking of Lord Hardstock, who for some unfathomable reason was a prime favourite with her.

Emily turned aside to hide her agitation. He was here! She would see him in less than an hour. Hurriedly she drew out Eva’s dinner dress and proceeded to brush her soft curls. And then she threw open her box and commenced to array herself in her most modish gown, one that had not seen daylight during the time that she had been in West Kensington. It was far too pretty, and there was nothing to dress for there. But to-night she must look her loveliest and best. With fingers that trembled with eagerness she drew the silken lace in and out of the bodice.

“Won’t you get cold?” asked Eva, whose bright eyes were fixed inquisitively upon her, and then as she got no answer she added, innocently, “What a pity that there wasn’t enough stuff to finish it.” And she pointed to where, cut square at back and front, it liberally displayed Miss Baillie’s fine shoulders.

Mrs. Armitage with some surprise and a good deal of annoyance remarked the change in her governess’s appearance. It

was in very questionable taste she thought to wear a low dress at a public table d'hôte. But she said nothing, and both Mrs. Strangways and Lord Hardstock shook hands, and they took their places.

"This is a surprise," cried Miss Baillie, who would have preferred that it should have appeared that she was in ignorance of Lord Hardstock's arrival. But the *enfant terrible* called out at the top of her shrill, little voice :

"I told you all about it. Don't you remember, Miss Baillie? "

Emily changed colour and Lord Hardstock laughed, and somehow his laugh nettled Miss Baillie. Her food seemed to choke her; she could scarcely swallow. She sat between Mrs. Strangways and Eva, and exactly facing her were Lord Hardstock and Mrs. Armitage. The dinner seemed as if it would never come to an end, and thankful at last she rose from her seat. Eva, who had run on ahead, looked saucily back at her governess, and at the same moment the heavy doors which she had pushed backwards swung to upon her. A shriek, a scream, and Constance had caught Eva in her arms. The child was frightened and very pale but there was no harm done.

"You should not have allowed her to

leave your side," said Mrs. Armitage. In her agitation she was scarcely conscious how aggressive her tone was and how much displeasure it conveyed. There were several guests standing near, and Miss Baillie tossed her head and walked deliberately up the long staircase without vouchsafing a single word in reply. She was trembling with anger, and furious at Mrs. Armitage for having dared to address her in such a tone.

Shortly afterwards Eva appeared, holding fast to her mother's hand. "I think she had better go to bed," said Constance. "Poor mite, it has shaken her. I don't think it would be wise to take her on the Spa to-night."

Emily could have wept. Was there ever such an unlucky series of disasters? To be kept at home all the evening because of this rebellious, tiresome child!

"Miss Baillie will nurse me and tell me a new story," said Eva, confidently.

But Miss Baillie did nothing of the sort. She stood silent and unresponsive while Mrs. Armitage gave her orders, and undressed and popped Eva into her bed in a twinkling, much to that young lady's astonishment and chagrin.

"I wish I'd gone out with mama and auntie," she remarked, plaintively.



"And so you could have done if you had not been disobedient," snapped her governess. "You have been told over and over again not to run about in that heedless fashion, and now you are punished for it."

"I don't think you are very kind," said Eva with a pout, and her eyes filled with tears. And then Miss Baillie took the candle away, and the poor little girl cried herself to sleep. But in the next room I doubt if Emily was in any happier frame of mind herself. It is doubtful what amount of pleasure she would have gleaned from accompanying Mrs. Armitage and her sister to the Spa. Lord Hardstock could scarcely have left them unattended to walk by her side, but she felt as if she had been defrauded of her rights, and she worked herself up into a state of wrath thereat. About a quarter past nine the little party returned and Constance ran upstairs to ask after her darling.

"She does not seem any the worse, does she?" she enquired anxiously. "She had a nasty blow on the temple."

"She has been asleep for more than an hour and a half," replied Miss Baillie, ungraciously; "many children get those sort of knocks every day in the week."

"I am very glad that mine does not."

Constance saw that her governess was ruffled, and so overlooked the insolence of her manner.

“And since I am not likely to be required, have I your permission to go out for a short time myself?”

“Most certainly,” said Mrs. Armitage. And as she left the room she could not help wondering if she had inadvertently given cause of offence.

“I do not think I like Miss Baillie as well as I did,” she confided to her sister as they sat side by side by the open windows in the drawing-room.

“I should certainly give her a hint to dress differently,” said Rebecca. “I really never saw such an exhibition. It was positively indecent. I cannot imagine what Lord Hardstock must have thought of it?”

“I am afraid that is a matter of supreme indifference to me, but since we are on that subject let me ask you what could have induced you to bring him down here, Rebecca?”

“I bring him down here, my dear! I bring him! Why, it was he who brought me. I told him I thought of spending a week with you here, and he said how odd it was, for that Captain Berkeley was at the Grand, and he rather thought of running

down himself. What could I say? I could scarcely find out by what train he was coming and arrange to follow by the next myself."

"No, I suppose not. It is curious how that man always manages to get his own way."

"Still that unreasoning prejudice, Constance! I thought it had crumbled away months ago."

"I don't think I am a woman easily prejudiced, but I have my likes and dislikes like everyone else. I say that I think it is a pity that Lord Hardstock should have followed me here, and that to have done so shows want of tact and bad taste on his part."

"I suppose he is only human. After all, why will you shut your eyes, Constance? And why do you try to steel your heart against him? You are bound to give in sooner or later."

"Never — never!" cried Constance, angrily. "Understand me once and for all, Rebecca. Lord Hardstock is less than nothing to me. I do not like—I can barely tolerate him."

"Why in the world does she try to throw dust in my eyes?" reflected Mrs. Strangways, who might be forgiven for adhering to her own opinions, strengthened

as they were by the very roseate shade Lord Hardstock contrived to throw over his relations with Mrs. Armitage. It was the merest hint, hardly more than an inflection of the voice, but it certainly conveyed to Mrs. Strangways' mind that there was far more between her sister and Lord Hardstock than Constance would admit.

"It is a shame," she said to herself. "For he would suit her so well, and he is so dreadfully in love, poor fellow."

The "poor fellow" was a mile away standing at the further end of the esplanade, a cigar between his lips and an ugly scowl on his face, and by his side stood Emily Baillie. She had passed him in the hall as she went out, and had whispered in his ear :

"I must speak to you, follow me at once."

And a pretty tramp she had given him up those steep inclines, but Emily was in no mood for trifling. She had come out here to have her say and would brook neither listeners nor observers.

"What have you to say to me?" she asked suddenly, as she wheeled round and faced him.

He might have asked that question of her, as it was she who had cajoled him to this distance.

"Perhaps you will allow me to get my breath before you expect me to talk," answered Lord Hardstock, looking very warm and uncomfortable and decidedly cross.

Had Emily been wise she would have slipped her hand within his arm and waited a better opportunity for indulging in reproaches, but she was so brimful of her own grievances that she lost sight of the discretion that is the better part of valour.

"What am I to think of you?" she cried, with flashing eyes; "are you acting fairly by me? Do you treat me as a man should treat the woman he means to make his wife? I am utterly sick of it. My love for you has kept me patient until now, but I have come to the end of my tether. I will not remain with Mrs. Armitage another day, and you must keep your promise and marry me at once."

A mocking laugh broke from Lord Hardstock's lips. "What an actress you would make! By Jove, you are superb. You would bring the house down, Emily. But strange as it may appear, I have no taste for amateur theatricals; so we will come down to the level of this work-a-day world. Let me see. You accuse me first of neglecting you, and then—by the way I think you forget to state precisely what

is my second offence — and lastly you demand — yes, actually demand that I should marry you out of hand. It cannot be done, my excellent Emily.”

Miss Baillie felt the ground slipping from beneath her feet, the cool sarcasm and utter indifference displayed by the man whom with all her faults she deeply loved, blunted the weapons in her hand, and stayed the sharp recrimination on her lips.

“If ever you should again treat me to such an exhibition as this I will never marry you. Do you understand me? Never, by God I swear it!”

He hissed the words into her ears, grasping her hands firmly in his own.

“Do you understand me? I will tell Mrs. Armitage the truth—what you are and what you have always been. I will declare that I was in ignorance of your real character until months after you entered her service, and that, moved by compassion and pity, I yielded to your prayers and remained silent. Now then, what would you have to say for yourself, my dear child?”

“I should say that you were a fiend—that there was no man on all God’s earth so vile and base as you.”

“I am much obliged to you,” said Lord Hardstock, raising his hat politely. “You

defy me," he continued, "and dare me to do my worst."

Emily did not answer him. Her lips were livid, her face was ashen pale and she leant against the iron railings gasping for breath.

"Emily, don't be a fool. Pull yourself together." He spoke roughly, but he was terribly frightened; there was a look of death on the stricken face.

A moment later she was sobbing wildly, the crisis had passed. He held her not ungently in his arms. It was growing dark. There was not a soul in sight. He could feel the quick beating of her heart as it hammered against his own. A tinge of pity woke within him.

"We have each of us said things that we must regret," he said, "and it will be wiser that we should both forget."

Her lips moved, but no words came.

"I will try and see you oftener, but it will be difficult. You must not be impatient—everything will come right if you will but wait." And then he drew her arm within his own and they walked slowly back towards the hotel. As they neared the bridge he paused.

"It will not look well if we are seen returning together. I will follow you."

A scornful smile flitted over her face, but she made him no answer.

“Good-night, my sweet.”

“Hush, you have lost all claim to my regard, and have no right henceforth to address me but as a stranger.”

“Then you mean——”

“I think we have both of us made our meaning so plain that there can be no possible mistake,” she said, coldly.

“Well, if you will have it so.”

He dropped her hand, and she continued her way alone.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

It has been truly said that no cord or cable could draw so forcibly or bind so fast as love can do with only a single thread. And when pride died out, the old devotion rushed back in a blinding flood upon Emily's aching heart. How mad she had been, how reckless, to cast in her lover's face the affection that had already cost her so dear! She felt that whatever chanced she must cling to him still, for life without him would be but a pitiful thing. Without Lord Hardstock all the warmth and sunshine would fade out of it. For her love's sake she must humble herself and ask for forgiveness.

The sad white face was pleading for itself. Every time he looked at her he longed to draw her to his bosom and kiss the drooping lips. Although he had not the remotest intention of making her his wife, he did not want to lose her altogether. She appealed to him—at any rate to his baser nature. Some people get a good deal of satisfaction out of a love that has a spice of devilry, and Emily could be very seductive and very fascinating when she chose.

So when a little incoherent note, all blurred and blotted with tears, was thrust beneath his door one night, although he smiled in a superior manner, as he contemplated it, he was well pleased that war should be at an end between them. And both Emily and Lord Hardstock felt considerably happier and more contented after the quarrel than they had been before it. The storm had cleared the air.

Feeling how slight was her hold upon him, Miss Baillie put forth all her woman's weapons, and was wonderfully softened and tender. And he, well pleased, inasmuch as he had proved himself master, could afford to be conciliatory and indulgent.

"Of course she could leave Mrs. Armitage if she chose to do so," he said, "but she would hardly find so pleasant a home combined with such light duties elsewhere, and for the short space of time that must elapse before she had a home of her own, it seemed a pity to make a change." Miss Baillie entirely agreed with him; and so everything settled down again.

Mrs. Armitage was puzzled—puzzled and a little troubled. She had written two letters to Basil St. Quentin, but to neither of them had she received any reply. This was strange, because she had heard from Daphne, who constantly made mention of

him in her letters, that he was in Paris and in perfect health. It was impossible that she could write again. But it gave her nevertheless a little pang to think that she was forgotten, and she found herself brooding over it, and vainly trying to account satisfactorily for it to herself.

That her bewitching little sister-in-law was at the bottom of the whole mystery she never suspected. Daphne's epistles, which were characteristic of herself, were like angels' visits, few and far between. She was not a good correspondent, and she hated a pen and ink medium, because it did not allow her to make use of the little mannerisms which her conversation was so full of. But every now and then her conscience pricked her, for she was in reality attached to Constance, and then she would sit down and scribble off a line, which nine times out of ten it was impossible to decipher. Daphne's writing looked a good deal as if a spider had dropped into an ink bottle and crawled over a sheet of paper.

One of these productions came to hand when they had been at Scarborough about a month, and Mrs. Armitage had begun to talk of home. There was a vein of discontent running throughout it which startled Constance.

“Gerald is a perfect tyrant,” wrote the little lady, “and grudges me any sort of amusement. I begin to think that single women are a good deal better off than we married ones.”

Of course it was a jest, but reading between the lines Constance could see that her sister-in-law was vexed and troubled, and knowing how shallow her nature was feared the result. Constance sat there with the letter in her hand, and then she came to a sudden resolution. She would invite Daphne to spend a few weeks with her in town. It would be a splendid excuse for returning. Lord Hardstock was still at Scarborough, and did not show the slightest intention of leaving, and the place had lost all charm for her. The little fable about Captain Berkeley had never imposed upon her for an instant. He was not and had never been at the Grand, and the sole reason that had brought Lord Hardstock to Scarborough was the fact that she was staying there. She felt provoked that Rebecca could not or would not see it. To make matters worse, this man was actually under the same roof with herself. He had made a feint at first of taking a room at another hotel, and gave it up at the end of a couple of days. It was noisy, he said, and there was not a nice class of people

staying there. He liked her hotel so much better. And then Mrs. Strangways had proposed that he should remove there. Constance could positively have shaken her for her interference. She was very vexed, and when appealed to on the point by her sister, remarked with considerable acidity, that "Lord Hardstock was the best judge of such matters," and the moment they were alone turned on Rebecca.

"You might have spared me this," she said. "I have a great mind to go back to town to-morrow."

Mrs. Strangways appeared surprised. She found considerable difficulty in understanding why her sister should be so much annoyed, and could see no valid reason why Lord Hardstock should not join their party.

But from that day all pleasure was gone for Constance. Lord Hardstock seemed ubiquitous—she could not escape from his presence. Whatever she did or wherever she went he inevitably appeared on the scene. And now at last without giving offence to anyone she had a reasonable excuse for bringing her visit to an end. The very next morning as they sat together on the Spa she broached her plans.

"I had a letter from my sister-in-law yesterday," she said, quietly, "and I find

that she wishes to pay me a visit at once, instead of waiting until August as was at first arranged, so I shall go home on Tuesday."

The band was playing the "Tour de Valse" and Constance hummed a few bars carelessly, but she did not glance at either of her companions.

"What a pity you are going so soon," said Mrs. Strangways. "The sea air is doing the child so much good."

"She shall have another holiday when Arthur comes home. I cannot disappoint Daphne."

And then the valse suddenly ceased, and they commenced to toil up the paths towards home.

Constance purposely avoided giving Lord Hardstock the chance for a *tête-à-tête*, and condemned herself to a lonely afternoon in her own room, but that was infinitely preferable to being forced to endure fulsome compliments and covert love-making. What little headway Lord Hardstock had made in her good graces he had entirely lost since she had seen so much of him, and she disliked him more cordially than she had ever done. He for his part was not altogether broken-hearted at having an hour or two to dispose of. For the last few days he had seen nothing of Miss

Baillie. Whether it was by accident or design, he could not determine, but she had certainly contrived to keep out of his way, and he began to feel a little piqued. Mrs. Armitage was perfection—an angel! but he found it somewhat wearisome at times to reach up to her level. “A saint is all very well for a wife,” he told himself, “but give me a sinner for a companion.” And with this reflection he started in quest of Emily Baillie.

She was sitting in a cosy little summer-house half-way between the bridge and the Spa. Her hat was on the ground at her feet, and a book lay open in her lap. Eva was nowhere in sight. Lord Hardstock stole softly round to the back and whispered in the small pink ear. The girl sprang to her feet.

“How you startled me! I never heard a sound,” she cried.

“What are you reading?”

She hid the book among the folds of her dress.

“Don’t be ridiculous,” said Lord Hardstock, possessing himself of it by main force, “as if I should imagine it was ‘Watt’s Hymns’ or the ‘Pilgrim’s Progress,’ or anything else in the goody-goody line.”

“Pray be cautious. Eva is running up and down, and she will be back in a minute.” Nevertheless she allowed herself to

be drawn closer to his side and gave herself up to the pleasure of contact with him.

"So you are off to town on Tuesday?"

"I did not know, but I am glad of it."

"Well, so am I for some reasons. First and foremost, because we can renew the good old times, Emily."

She glanced up at him with grateful eyes, wholly unable to conceal the pleasure his words gave her. Then they fell to discussing ways and means.

"You will have many chances to get away when Mrs. Gerald is there."

"I doubt it. I am more likely to be tied hand and foot, Rupert," she cried, impulsively "Do you like children? I don't and can't. I dare say it is unnatural and wicked, but I hate them."

He laughed. "I think I am rather fond of Eva," he answered, lazily. "She is such a frank little lady."

"I'd like to whip the frankness out of her. A spoilt brat—that is nearer the mark. Mrs. Armitage makes herself ridiculous about her."

"And yet she is not a demonstrative woman."

"No, you could scarcely call her that. She positively freezes me. You have known her a long time; was she always like that?"



"She was always dignified and haughty, but somehow I think she has changed of late."

"It is easy to see that she does not like you, Rupert," she said, in sublime unconsciousness of the torture she was inflicting, "and of course that makes her manner more repellant. I suppose she has a heart and could be made to soften it to something like warmth and life under the right influence."

"I really don't know why you should assume that I am not a favourite with her."

The girl lifted her face to look in his. The resentment in his tone had been somewhat of a surprise to her; it had never occurred to her that Lord Hardstock could care two pins for Mrs. Armitage.

"Perhaps you are a favourite. How should I know?" she replied, lightly. "Anyhow, if so, she takes a curious way of showing it."

How it maddened Lord Hardstock to know that what she said was true. Men love women in so many different ways. With some it is the wild, despairing desire for the unattainable; with others a fierce greed for possession; few—so few that they are hardly worth recording—know anything of a love that is pure and unselfish, giving all and asking for nothing.

It was very pleasant sitting there with the soft lap of the waves, as they kissed the shore, the only sound to break the stillness. The air was fragrant with the scent of the flowers and Emily was in her most charming mood.

"Miss Baillie," cried a small unwelcome voice at the entrance. "Oh, you have come, how nice!" and Eva ran in and perched herself upon Lord Hardstock's lap. It must be confessed that at that moment Lord Hardstock endorsed Miss Baillie's opinion of children in general and of Eva in particular. His face was not particularly amiable as he glanced down at the small torment.

"We are busy talking," he said, coaxingly. "Suppose you go up to the flagstaff seat, and look down and see if you can distinguish us from there."

"I know I can't. It is too far off," answered Eva, determined not to be humbugged.

Emily laughed. She was glad that Lord Hardstock was baffled, even though it involved a certain amount of annoyance to herself.

"I wonder if you could go to the chalybeate spring and buy me a *Standard*?"

"They don't sell papers there — only buckets and spades."

"Oh, very well, buy yourself the biggest bucket you can find, and mind you take sufficient time to choose a nice one."

This was a temptation before which Eva succumbed, and her fat white legs were soon racing over the ground.

"Don't hurry, Eva," shouted Lord Hardstock, as he put his hands to his mouth in trumpet fashion. And then turned to Emily, who was smiling and blushing, well pleased to mark his eagerness. It was certainly the happiest afternoon that Miss Baillie had spent for many weeks. And she almost persuaded herself that the man she loved loved her in equal measure. But it is folly to wager a woman's fond, foolish, trusting heart against an organ of granite such as beat in Lord Hardstock's breast. She was bound to be worsted in the encounter.

"Good-bye, my little devil!" he whispered, as Eva hove in sight with a pail as big as her small self, held triumphantly forth.

"When I am your wife I shall not let you call me such names," said Emily. But Lord Hardstock made no answer.

Later on, Eva, in great glee, displayed her prize to her mother. "See," said she, "what Lord Hardstock gave me for running away, while he talked to Miss Baillie."

“Oh, Eva, that is a very strange way of putting it.” Miss Baillie began to grow rather uncomfortable. Mrs. Strangways’ keen eyes were bent upon her, and from that moment Rebecca distrusted her. Whatever children did or did not do, they were, as a rule, given to speaking the truth when they themselves had nothing to hide, and she attached far greater importance to Eva’s words than did her sister.

“My dear Rebecca, why should he not enjoy a chat with Miss Baillie?” said Constance. “He has known her intimately for years. There is nothing remarkable in it so far as I can see.”

And Mrs. Strangways began to reflect that Constance was the most perplexing and contradictory person she had ever met.

## CHAPTER XIX.

DAPHNE ARMITAGE was out of her element in the West Kensington *ménage*. Her pretty blandishments were disregarded and her brilliant repartees fell somewhat flat. She felt that she was not appreciated at her right worth and this she resented. Constance was as sweet and charming as it was possible for a hostess to be, but there were none of the nobler sex to captivate, and Daphne secretly pined for new worlds to conquer. Lord Hardstock, it is true, joined the little circle occasionally, but, as she looked upon him as her sister-in-law's exclusive property, he hardly counted.

Dr. Dale she considered a handsome and most agreeable man, but the very first evening he spent in her society he had the execrable taste to allow her to perceive his admiration for the governess, and after that—well Daphne shrugged her plump shoulders, and made a little move of contempt. She cordially detested Miss Baillie. She could see nothing in her to admire, and she openly expressed her opinion that she was a mass

of artificiality from the tip of her head to the sole of her foot. "I call her a nasty, scheming adventuress," she said one day.

Constance looked grieved. She had long ago given up being shocked at anything Daphne might say or do, for the little lady openly disregarded all conventionalities laid down for ordinary mortals, and acted precisely as the whim of the moment suggested. She was like a brilliantly painted butterfly that had settled on a cabbage field, and pined for a more congenial resting place. But she had not the remotest intention of returning to Paris to her husband. The way in which she spoke of him grated upon Constance terribly. He had brought her to England himself, and had stayed a couple of days, but, short though the visit was, Mrs. Armitage could not but see that the relations between them were sadly strained. At parting he spoke a word or two of admonition to his wife, and, however ill-timed it might have been, at all events it was purely affectionate feeling that dictated it. She was to be guided in all things by Constance, he said, and not to let her foolish brain run away with her.

Now Daphne was mightily indignant at all this.

"I wonder you don't engage a nurse-maid for me at once," she said, resentfully, "since I am incapable of behaving properly without being looked after."

Constance knew from past experience that it was useless to reason with her. She was nothing but a spoilt child.

"Really, I think she is prettier than ever," she said, warmly to her brother-in-law, honestly glad that there was something she could speak of approvingly.

"God grant that her beauty may not be her greatest curse," he answered. And there were tears in his voice.

Constance glanced at him quickly. "She is very young," she said, "you must be patient."

"Of course she is young, but the worst of it is that she doesn't grow wiser. I used to hope at first that she would, but of late I can hardly bring myself to speak of it even to you. But a horrid suspicion has come over me that her love is not so deep as it was, and that she is growing weary of me."

"If you are right," said Constance, earnestly, "depend upon it, it rests only with yourself to strengthen her love. We women are very much as you men make us. Remember that love begets love, and there is nothing too great for it to accomplish if it be pure and true."

Gerald Armitage sprang from his chair and paced up and down the room. "Ah!" he said, "if there were more women like you, there would be happier homes and fewer discontented men."

"I am terribly full of faults," she said, hurriedly. "I fear that I am not at all an easy person to live with."

"I am sure that poor Cyril would not have endorsed that statement. I don't suppose that you two ever exchanged a harsh or bitter word." He paused in front of her and marvelled to see the distressed look which crept over her whole face. The tears glittered in her eyes, and seeing them he turned away, angry with himself that he should have reminded her of her lost happiness, in blissful ignorance of the truth.

"If you will make my darling little wife as good and true as you are, Constance, I shall be the happiest man in the world."

But it was beyond Constance's power to sway and control that wayward mind. Precept and example might do something, but they could not work miracles, and weeds throve apace where the flowers should have blossomed. As is usual in such cases, there were faults on both sides. If Daphne was wilful and vain, Gerald was obstinate and unyielding.



"He is so selfish," said Daphne with a pout. "How can he possibly expect me to be interested in his stupid fogey friends, most of them a century old. And he objects to my being intimate with anyone nearer my own age."

"That is hardly fair. But have you no women friends, Daphne?"

"Oh, yes, I don't mean women, but——"

Constance could not help smiling. "My dear," she said, gravely, "no husband, be he old or young, would approve of his wife forming near friendships with other men."

"Oh, you are as bad as he is."

"I have lived longer than you, at all events, and am more experienced. I can see shoals and quicksands ahead of which you guess nothing."

"Now there was Mr. St. Quentin," continued Daphne (and at the mention of that name Constance's heart beat a shade faster), "he was awfully nice, but Gerald found out that I had been to the Bois with him, and, if I had broken every one of the commandments, I pledge you my word that he could not have made more fuss. I should only like you to have heard him. I was giddy, he said, and had no thought for my own position or for his honour. Ridiculous rubbish!"

"I don't think you ought to have gone about alone with Mr. St. Quentin, Daphne. A young married woman cannot be too careful of appearances."

"It is all very well to preach," answered Daphne, tossing her head scornfully. "But, now I come to think of it, you did not think it wicked to spend a whole afternoon alone with him when I was at Neuilly, although you are engaged to another man."

"Daphne, what are you saying?"

This was turning the tables with a vengeance. Never until now had Constance suspected that her sister-in-law knew of that stolen *tete-a-tete*; but the accusation contained in the latter part of her speech swallowed up any uneasiness she might have felt.

"I must ask you to explain your meaning?" continued Constance, feeling herself growing very hard and cold.

"Well, if you are not engaged to Lord Hardstock, you are a thousand times worse than I have ever been."

Daphne tried to rush from the room after this shot, but Constance restrained her.

"Again I ask you, please explain yourself."

And mortified, tingling with the un-

pleasant conviction that, having asserted herself, she must now stick to her colours, she blurted out the whole story.

"You were never more mistaken in your life," said Constance. "Lord Hardstock is not, and never has been, and never will be, my lover. Have you spoken of this to Gerald?"

"I don't know—I think not; I don't remember." Her hesitating manner confirmed Mrs. Armitage's fear that she had done so.

"You must give me your word," she said, "that you will put this matter straight. I don't choose that my brother-in-law should labour under any misapprehension with regard to my affairs. You will disabuse his mind, Daphne. It is a matter of far greater importance to me than probably you realise."

She was thinking of Basil St. Quentin, and what she should do if any such absurd rumour should reach his ears. And yet why should she care? Surely he knew her too well to credit it. But from that day she was ill at ease. Daphne had spoken so confidently, and appeared so certain of what she was saying. It did seem as if Lord Hardstock was to spring up on every side to vex and worry her.

Once or twice she was within an ace of

asking her sister-in-law point blank if the subject had been broached before Mr. St. Quentin, but she kept silence for two reasons; first, because of an inexplicable sensation of shyness and diffidence that prevented her from mentioning his name and appearing to display any interest in him, and secondly, because she feared that Daphne's veracity was not to be relied upon.

"Whether she has spoken to Mr. St. Quentin or not, she is absolutely certain to deny having done so. She never by any chance 'tells of herself,' as the children say."

If it had not been for Mrs. Strangways, Daphne would have been terribly bored in London, but that lady took compassion on her, and chaperoned her to one or two festivities. Since the death of her husband, Constance had given up every sort of amusement. Lord Hardstock tried in vain to persuade her to go to the theatre on one occasion.

"I really don't care to go," she said. "The heat and glare are insufferable at this time of the year."

"You may take me, Lord Hardstock," put in Daphne, wickedly. "Would it be too dreadful, Constance, if Lord Hardstock bored himself to that extent?"

Mrs. Armitage's face assumed a doubtful

look. Truth to tell, she was afraid to trust her reckless little sister-in-law out of her sight.

"I will get a box, and Miss Baillie shall come with us. It will be a treat for her, poor girl," said Lord Hardstock, quickly.

"Why do you call her 'poor girl?'" asked Daphne. "That sort of person scarcely expects dissipation, does she?"

"I don't think you quite understand Miss Baillie's position here," remarked Constance, gently. "She gives her services in exchange for a home with me. I pay her nothing."

"Oh, I see," said Daphne, stifling a yawn behind her fan, "she is a sort of non-salaried dependant." And as she spoke the words, the door opened to admit Eva and her governess.

Whatever else she was, Miss Baillie was undoubtedly a magnificent actress, for although every one of the slighting words, spoken in Daphne's most insolent manner, had fallen distinctly upon her ears, she did not give the faintest evidence that she understood their import, but with a smile on her face crossed the floor to where Mrs. Armitage sat.

"Eva and I are going out for half-an-hour, now that it is cooler. Can I do anything for you?"

Constance answered in the negative. And when they were gone and Eva's merry voice could be heard prattling in the hall, Daphne broke into an amused laugh.

"What a joke!" she said, and curled herself up on the sofa, well pleased that she had inflicted a sting on the girl she disliked.

"My dear Daphne, do you forget the golden rule?"

"Is it a riddle? Oh yes, I know. Why are two girls kissing each other fulfilling the golden rule? Because they are doing to each other as they would that men should do unto them."

"You are perfectly incorrigible." But despite herself, Constance was compelled to laugh.

"Why are you different to all the rest of us?" asked Daphne by-and-bye, when Lord Hardstock, finding that he was not going to be invited to dinner, had taken his hat and made his adieux.

"Am I?"

"Yes. Your very name has a frigid sound about it. You never could have been 'Con' or 'Conny'—only Constance."

"Do you find me then so unlovable?"

"Not that—not that in the least—but a little wee bit unapproachable. I never know what your real thoughts and feelings are.

You keep them all bottled up, and you always talk in such a proper way that you make me feel like a naughty child, only just let off a whipping. I love you, and yet I am more than half afraid of you. It must be dreadful to have a character to keep up. Don't you long to do something desperate sometimes?"

"No, most certainly I don't. Neither will you when you grow older. You are such a baby, Daphne—time will cure you of your follies."

"Will it? I think I would rather remain as I am. Do you think me pretty, Constance?"

She looked more than pretty at that moment with the wild rose colour in her face coming and going, and the big eyes luminous and glowing like stars.

"Yes, you are very pretty," answered Constance. But she sighed as she spoke, for she recalled her brother-in-law's words, and trembled for what the future might hold for the impulsive emotional girl-wife, who seemed to be absolutely incapable of understanding the responsibilities of life, or looking upon herself in any other light than that of a lay figure to receive admiration and to be petted and praised.

## CHAPTER XX.

MISS BAILLIE did not altogether enjoy her evening at the theatre, although she sat by Lord Hardstock's side. There was a good deal of bitter mixed with the sweet, and Daphne's mocking words still rankled within her. Moreover, that young lady seemed bent on monopolising every iota of attention, and to be jealous of any stray word that might be addressed to anyone but herself. She was bent on mischief, was naughty Daphne. Having arrived at the astonishing fact that Lord Hardstock was not engaged to Constance, she singled him out immediately as an admirer for herself. To do Daphne justice, she never poached on other people's preserves; very probably for the simple reason that she did not think it worth the trouble, and she looked on one of the male species, who happened to be in love with another woman, as a creature absolutely unsatisfactory, and indeed devoid of all interest.

To-night her eyes sparkled merrily, and her lovely little face was alive with fun and coquetry.

"You are better off than most of your



sex here this evening," she said, naïvely, "for Miss Baillie and I are by far the best looking women in the theatre, and you have us both all to yourself."

"A little pig in clover," whispered Emily into Lord Hardstock's other ear; and although it was said in pure jest, the speech grated on him. He disliked anything approaching slang, and Emily, it must be confessed, was inclined to be a little coarse sometimes.

Under cover of the music Daphne made a small confession. "Do you know," she said, archly, "that I actually fancied you were fond of my sister-in-law?"

"So I am. I admire Mrs. Armitage immensely "

"Ah! but I thought you were in love with her. Wasn't it absurd of me? I do get the oddest notions into my head sometimes."

"And how did you find out your mistake? "

"Constance enlightened me. She was most indignant. You never had been and never would be her lover, she said."

"Very probably. No doubt her choice lies elsewhere. I always believed that she was attached to St. Quentin," he said in a tone that had a flavour of bitterness about it, "Anyhow he was frightfully gone over her."

It was Daphne's turn to feel uncomfortable.

"Oh, no!" she said, "you are quite mistaken. I am perfectly certain there is nothing between them."

"You ought to know, of course," said Lord Hardstock, caressing his moustache, thoughtfully, "for they must have met pretty often at your house when Mrs. Armitage was in Paris."

This was a feeler, but Daphne swallowed the bait. "Perhaps," she remarked, coquettishly and with drooping eyelids, "perhaps he might have found other attractions there."

Lord Hardstock could scarcely be blamed for embracing the golden opportunity thus presented to him, and assuring the silly little woman that, had he been in St. Quentin's place, he should have had eyes for no one but her.

And Daphne believed every word he said. She gave vent to a little sigh that meant a good deal, and she leaned back in her chair with a pleased expression on her face—a little embarrassed perhaps, but a great deal gratified. All this was not, as may be well imagined, very entertaining for a third party. The piece was stupid, there was no one in the house worth looking at, and that atrocious little flirt, Mrs. Gerald

Armitage, was endeavouring to lure her lover into whispered confidences. Miss Baillie's patience was quickly exhausted.

"I feel quite faint," she murmured, languidly. "The heat is most oppressive."

Her ruse was successful. Lord Hardstock turned towards her in alarm, and from that moment divided his attention between the ladies.

"I might have had a much better time if we had not brought that wretched governess with us," reflected Daphne, as they drove homewards. "I am sure Lord Hardstock admires me immensely "

"Catch me going out again with Mrs. Gerald," was Miss Baillie's outspoken thought. "She would like me to play gooseberry, but you don't catch a weasel asleep."

And even Lord Hardstock began dimly to perceive that he had made a mistake.

"Good-night, Lord Hardstock," said Miss Baillie, holding out her hand.

"Oh, don't go; pray come in," cried Daphne, entreatingly. "Constance is sure to be sitting up for us."

Mrs. Armitage was in the drawing-room and came to the door. "How have you enjoyed it?" she asked.

"Pretty well. Three's a stupid number," answered Daphne, with a pout, whereupon Emily turned round quickly.

"Perhaps you will wait to make your ill-bred remarks until the third person has disappeared," said she. And she flew up the staircase to her own room.

"What on earth have I done?" asked Daphne, lifting an innocent and puzzled face to her companions. "I always seem to be putting my foot in it. But what a virago that girl is! I should be afraid to live under the same roof with her."

"I have hardly ever seen her out of temper," said Constance. "Your remark was very ill-timed, Daphne."

"Oh, if people are so ridiculously thin-skinned, they must expect a pin-prick or two."

Lord Hardstock said nothing. He did not care to espouse Emily's cause, fearing the construction that the others might put upon it, but in his heart he felt extremely vexed. The girl had been behaving so admirably of late that it was a pity this little fire-brand should have come into their midst to upset everything. With all her beauty, Daphne was not a favourite of his. He read her narrow, selfish little soul, and heartily pitied the man who called her wife. As for Emily, she cried herself to sleep that night. Never in her life had she been so insulted. And Mrs. Armitage, looking at her swollen eyes and tear-

stained face, was not altogether surprised when, immediately after breakfast, she asked to be allowed a few words alone, and then made a request that she should be permitted to take a week's holiday. "I would rather give up my position altogether than have to endure any more insolence from Mrs. Gerald," she added, hotly.

It seemed to be always Constance's task to pour oil on troubled waters. And in this instance she felt that Miss Baillie had right and reason on her side.

"I am very, very sorry," she said gently. "I fear my sister-in-law's tongue runs away with her, and that she hardly knows what she does say. But pray take the holiday you ask for, Miss Baillie. There is no reason whatever why you should not do so."

But before nightfall Miss Baillie had reconsidered her decision. Mrs. Strangways had written, inviting Daphne to spend a few days with her, as she had some extra dissipation in the shape of two dinner-parties, one of which was to be followed by a dance. Of course Daphne was eager to accept and ran off to pen a reply. Constance gave a sigh of relief. Miss Baillie was useful to her in many ways, she took the entire charge of Eva off her

hands, and she would have greatly missed her. Something of this she expressed to Emily, and the girl felt cheered by the knowledge that she was really valued by her employer.

"What a fortunate man he would be who won her heart," she told herself. "For she is a woman in ten thousand. Uninteresting and vapid though she may seem, she is thoroughly genuine, and would never stoop to anything little or under-hand."

So Daphne packed up her trunks, singing to herself the while; overjoyed at the prospect before her, and I am afraid that nobody tried to alter her determination, but on the contrary they congratulated themselves that there would now be some chance of a little peace and quiet.

When Daphne came downstairs in an exquisite walking costume, and wearing her latest purchase—a hat of somewhat pronounced shape—Constance looked up in surprise.

"My dear," she said, "surely you are not thinking of going to Clarges Street now? I intend to drive you there later on."

"Oh, it doesn't matter," she said, with a pretence of indifference. "I may just as well have a hansom and start at once.

You see I shall have to unpack, and it is more than unlikely that Mrs. Strangways may have guests to-night."

Constance said no more, but kissed the pretty face and stood with Eva at her side, watching the hansom drive away. The luggage had some time before been fetched by Dyne in a four-wheeler.

Daphne bowed and smiled—her face radiant and dimpled. So slight a thing pleased her, such a trifle reduced her to tears and musing. It is an open question, after all, whether temperaments such as hers do not get the best of it in this matter-of-fact world of ours.

After she had gone, Constance took her little daughter on her lap and instructed her in some of the intricacies of needle-work.

"Mamma," said Eva, suddenly, "do you love Auntie Daphne?"

"Very much. She is very pretty, Eva, is she not?"

"It is better to be good than pretty," answered the child, drawing herself up with a superior air.

"Yes, it certainly is. But Auntie Daphne is both?"

"Perhaps," said Eva, looking extremely doubtful. "I am glad I am not her little girl," she continued, gravely.

Miss Baillie was in her room, and they spent a cosy afternoon together. Eva had beguiled her mother into singing nursery rhymes, and they were busily engaged with :

“ I’ve a little black dolly called Topsy,  
And she doesn’t like sleeping alone ! ”

when the door opened and Mrs. Strangeways entered.

“ Where in the world is Mrs. Gerald ? ” she asked.

“ Is she not with you ? ” said Constance, looking frightened. “ She left here at three o’clock. ”

“ And it is now six. Well, I can’t wait. I promised to look in at Lady Fitz-Hugh’s this afternoon, and as Daphne had not arrived I thought I would pick her up and take her there with me. ”

“ It is very strange ? ” said Constance. “ Surely nothing has happened to her, Rebecca ? ”

“ What should happen to her in broad daylight ? You always speak of your sister-in-law as if she were a perfect baby ”

“ And in truth she is little more, ” said Constance, becoming very anxious. And after her sister had departed she put on her bonnet and had herself driven to Clarges Street.



Mrs. Gerald had not yet arrived, so Constance sat down to wait with what patience she could muster. At a quarter to seven Mrs. Strangways returned. Still no Daphne. At last a hansom drove up at a sharp trot, and a minute later Daphne's voice could be heard on the stairs.

"Am I late? Oh, Mrs. Strangways, do forgive me." She paused, amazed to find Constance there, and looked very uncomfortable.

"Where have you been?" asked Constance, almost on the verge of tears. She had really been very uneasy and was more than a little relieved to find that nothing had happened to her sister-in-law.

Daphne's face quickly assumed a defiant aspect. "I have been shopping," she said. "There were several things I wanted. You always hurry one so, Constance. I could spend hours in looking in at the windows and turning over the pretty things on the counters. It is such absurdity to pretend that one is obliged to buy everything one looks at. What are the men behind the counters for except to wait on people?" She rattled on evidently with a wish to gain time.

"And where did you go?" asked Mrs. Strangways, looking upon her sister's distress

as ridiculous and unnecessary. But the girl's answer somewhat staggered her.

"I went to the Burlington Arcade," she said, "and to tell you the truth, I was horribly disappointed. I thought it was a dreadful place—you know you said so, Constance—but I never saw a single thing; in fact it was nearly empty. There were a few people strolling up and down, but hardly anyone in the shops."

Constance was almost speechless.

"I met with an adventure though," continued Daphne briskly, as though it was the most delightful thing in the world. "I went into one of the flower shops and ordered some exquisite gardenias for to-morrow, and when I came out I crossed over to look at some dear little brooches in a window opposite. A tall and fine, and, oh! such a handsome man, Constance—I believe he was a duke at least—touched me on the arm. 'I beg your pardon,' he said, 'you have dropped your handkerchief.' Of course I thanked him, and was going to put it in my pocket when I saw that it was not mine at all—mine are all initialled, you know. Funny, wasn't it? But we were good friends after that."

Constance glanced at her sister. Mrs. Strangways' face was set after the method common to her when vexed. "Surely

you did not allow a stranger to enter into conversation with you, Daphne? You must have known it was most improper ”

“ But he was quite a gentleman.”

“ He would most certainly not imagine that you were a lady.”

“ I am sure he liked me very much. You are always so cross, Constance ; everything I do is wrong.”

“ Have you spent all these hours with this man then ? ” put in Rebecca, sternly

“ Oh, no ; we walked down Piccadilly, and he wanted me to have some lunch at—I forget where—but I wasn’t hungry, so I asked him to call a hansom. Oh, Constance ! I have not seen such a handsome man since I have been in London.”

“ Did he hear you tell the man where to drive ? ” asked Constance, miserably.

“ I don’t know—yes, he must have done, for I asked him what the fare was to Clarges Street before I got in, and the dishonest cabman insisted on having two shillings, although he had mistaken the address and driven me somewhere out of Holborn, and then just as I got down, feeling sure that it was not the right street, who should I see but Lord Hardstock. Was it not fortunate ? I told him all my troubles, and he took me somewhere and gave me a cup of tea, and at last I

found my way here. Quite a chapter of accidents, wasn't it? But I think I managed to get out of them very well."

Constance rose to her feet with what was for her quite a tragic air. "My dear Daphne," she said, more coldly than that young lady had ever heard her speak, "I shall send you back to Gerald, for I simply dare not take the responsibility of you any longer."

"Now what have I done?" asked Daphne, falling back on her old cry. "I could not prevent the man speaking to me, and it was not my fault that the cabman drove me wrong. I always get blamed for everything."

Constance could have laughed, only that she felt too heartsick. She did not believe that her sister-in-law was the innocent, unsophisticated creature she pretended to be. "However quietly she may have been brought up in India, at all events she has lived in Europe long enough to know that ladies do not make acquaintance with men they chance to meet in the streets," she told herself. "There is a good deal of method in Daphne's madness and recklessness. It was not for nothing that she had donned her finest gown and sported her new hat. Oh, my poor Gerald," she thought, "I much fear that you will have all your work cut out for you."

## CHAPTER XXI.

THE immediate result of Daphne's escaped was that Mr. Armitage received from his sister-in-law a letter which was a marvel of tact and diplomacy. In the first place she begged him to spare them a few days, and told him what pleasure it would give her could she succeed in inducing him to do so. Then, too, she suggested that he must be quite lost without his pretty little wife, and lastly she hinted that too much independence might not be productive of the best results to a character such as Daphne's. She did not, of course, in so many words say "Fetch her home," but Mr. Armitage must have been very dull of comprehension had he for one instant mistaken her meaning.

Two days later he arrived. He had business in London, he said, and he had determined to kill two birds with one stone—transact his business, and then escort Daphne back to Paris.

"I hope," said Constance, "that at least you will spend a week in London now you are here."

“A day or two,” he answered—“not longer. Where is my wife?”

“She is still on a visit to Mrs. Strangways. I expect her back to-morrow. You will not go to Clarges Street to-night? I know that my sister and Daphne are going to a dance.”

Constance spoke anxiously, for she dreaded the effect her husband’s appearance might have on the wilful girl, and she was anxious not to widen the gulf between them.

“Oh, no; I should not think of it. It is late, and to tell you the truth I am rather done up. It was a rough crossing, and I am not the best of sailors.”

And though Constance felt relieved she could not but notice how indifferent his manner was, and wonder a little that he should not show more eagerness to see his wife after so long a separation. Daphne duly returned the following afternoon, all smiles and dimples. No one had told her that Gerald had arrived, and she ran lightly upstairs into the drawing-room.

“Oh! I have had such fun,” she cried, and then she paused. The colour died out of her face. “Well I never! What has brought you here?” she added in quite a different tone, and lifted her cheek for her husband’s caress.

"You don't seem particularly overjoyed at seeing me," said Mr. Armitage. Whatever indifference he might show, he was not prepared to tolerate the same amount in his wife's bearing.

"I hate surprises," snapped Daphne, "and I think you ought to have written and told me you were coming."

"You did not expect me to stay away for ever, did you? I suppose it never struck you that home might be a trifle dull for me alone?"

Daphne's eyes filled slowly with tears. "Then you have come to take me back?" she faltered.

"You must not outstay your welcome. You have paid a long visit already, my child."

"Just as I was enjoying myself so much," she cried, with the air of a child when bedtime is at hand.

"Have you been so very happy then?"

There was a certain wistfulness in his tone. How he would love her, this fractious spoilt child, if she would let him. But it was always the same. He felt himself held at arms' length. He was too grave and too sad, and her buoyant nature craved for youth and sunshine. Two years ago it had not seemed to Gerald Armitage that he was too old for his wife, but now it

was no uncommon thing for the conviction to force itself upon him.

"I never was so happy." The tears rolled down her cheeks on to the pretty gown she wore. With an impatient gesture she dashed them away and sprang from her chair. At the door she almost ran into Constance's arms.

"My dear, Lord Hardstock is here. Now, don't run away."

Mrs. Armitage, seeing signs of distress in her sister-in-law's face, passed her quickly and closed the door.

Lord Hardstock was just ascending the stairs. In an instant Daphne darted down them into the hall.

"All our fun is over," she cried, clasping her hands round his arm. "My jailer has come for me. Oh! what am I to do?"

The real position of affairs did not strike Lord Hardstock for the moment. He saw that Daphne was in trouble, and that the pretty little face was stained with tears. And, hating to see a woman—and especially a pretty woman—in distress, without pausing to reflect he drew her into the dining-room.

"What in the world is the matter?" he asked.

Then Daphne began to pour out her



troubles. Gerald had come to take her back to Paris, and she hated the life there. Her husband was so slow, so stupid, even cross sometimes, and then she added with a coquettish uplifting of her eyebrows, "I don't want you to go, Lord Hardstock."

And Lord Hardstock soothed her, although his sympathies were scarcely enlisted on her side quite as much as she imagined they were. He could easily understand that Mr. Armitage did sometimes lose his temper, and had adequate cause for doing so. But of course he did not tell the little lady this. What he did say was that any man must be a brute who could speak sharply to her, and Daphne wept a few more tears and then, with a swift recollection that her face was apt to bear such traces for an unpleasant length of time, she carefully dried them and endeavoured to be comforted.

"You will come over to Paris and see me often, won't you?" she pleaded.

And then he promised he would do as she wished, without the faintest intention of carrying out such a promise.

Upstairs in the drawing-room Mrs. Armitage waited in vain for the visitor whose arrival had been announced. Unfortunately she had informed her brother-

in-law that Lord Hardstock had called, and they both sat watching the door and marvelling at his non-appearance.

Then Constance rang the bell. "Where is Lord Hardstock?" she asked, when a servant answered her summons.

"I don't know, ma'am," said the girl, looking round the room as though his lordship might be hiding behind the curtains. "I saw him go up the stairs."

"Another time yon will take visitors up to the drawing-room yourself, and not leave them to find their way alone," said Mrs. Armitage, sternly.

"Is it Lord Hardstock who is lost, stolen, or strayed?" cried Miss Baillie, as she passed the door. "He is in the dining-room with Mrs. Gerald."

"Yes, and they don't want me," cried little Eva, who had hold of her governess's hand and appeared extremely indignant. "'Little girls should not go where they are not wanted,' Auntie Daphne said, and she'd been crying, so I don't expect she's a bit gooder than me."

Having fired her shot, Miss Baillie dragged her charge upstairs, and the child could be heard protesting all the way up, until the closing of the school-room door shut out her voice.

Constance scarcely dared to look at her

brother-in-law. Rising hurriedly and murmuring something about hot rooms and Daphne which was quite unintelligible, she left Mr. Armitage to himself. Opening the dining-room door she walked straight up to her sister-in-law, entirely ignoring Lord Hardstock's presence.

"Are you mad?" she said, angrily. "Upon my word, I would not have believed that you could have been so fool-hardy. For pity's sake go up to your husband and make what explanation you can."

Daphne stared at her in absolute amazement. Evidently she had not the most remote conception that she had been misconducting herself.

"As for you, Lord Hardstock," continued Mrs. Armitage, "I can find no words in which to express my annoyance that you should have encouraged my sister-in-law in acting so indiscreetly."

"I pledge you my word," began Lord Hardstock, wishing himself a hundred leagues away and anathematising the luckless cause of this rebuke, "I pledge you my word I had not the least idea of worrying you in any way."

Daphne stood her ground. Having rolled her handkerchief into a ball, she was vigorously administering a dab to

her eyes here and there where the tears were still not quite dried. Most devoutly did she hope that they were not pink-rimmed.

“Why did you not come upstairs, and what has possessed you to stay down here alone? There must be some explanation for such an unusual proceeding,” said Mrs. Armitage. Little did she guess what wild hopes she was raising in Lord Hardstock’s breast. He had jumped at once to the conclusion that she was jealous of his attention to her sister-in-law, and that she was piqued and wounded at his having remained with her so long. Of course such a ridiculous idea had never once crossed her mind. All she feared was an open rupture between husband and wife.

“I will bid you good afternoon now,” she said, holding out her hand. “Mr. Armitage is here, and while he remains I shall not be at home to visitors.” And she deliberately turned her back upon Lord Hardstock.

Not knowing what to make of this, but on the whole believing that it might be construed into a sign of warmer feeling for himself, Lord Hardstock took up his hat and a moment later the hall door shut upon him.

At the end of five minutes Mrs. Armitage returned to the drawing-room and to Daphne’s husband.

“Is that Lord Hardstock who has just gone?” he asked, suspiciously. “What did he want with my wife?”

Constance laid her hands softly on his arm. “It did seem strange,” she said, “told as we heard it told, but the matter was simple enough. Daphne had commissioned Lord Hardstock to buy some bric-à-brac for her, and it was really her, and not me, he came to see this afternoon. That explains it, you see.”

Constance was not an adept in the art of lying, and her wavering colour and the manner in which her eyes—eyes so loyal and honest—refused to meet his own, gave him an uncomfortable sense of uneasiness, but inclining to the idea that Lord Hardstock was a suitor of Constance, he tried to dismiss from his mind the wretched doubts and fears that had been crowding in upon it during the last quarter of an hour.

He said no more, and Daphne having been soundly scolded by her sister-in-law and warned that if she did not hold out the olive branch and conduct herself graciously to her husband she would inevitably be spirited off the next day, came to the conclusion that she had better behave herself, and indeed really tried to do so.

But it was a wearisome evening. Constance was out of spirits, and Daphne

yawned continuously, and Mr. Armitage felt that what little conversation he was capable of fell very flat, and Miss Baillie sat absolutely voiceless and mute.

She felt perfectly wretched, unhappy girl that she was. She told herself that her heart was breaking. What could Rupert mean by flirting in this open and outrageous fashion under her very nose? Had he possessed a particle of respect and esteem for her, he would, at least, have made some effort to cloak his infidelities. If anything, she, Emily, overrated Daphne's charms; for, as we know, Lord Hardstock had never fancied himself for a single instant in love with her. She amused him. He liked to watch her pretty affectations, and laugh at them, much as he would have done at some toddling maiden mimicking the airs and graces of her seniors: but there it began, and there it ended.

The real danger lay much nearer home, if the short-sighted Emily could have seen it. Oh, how she longed for Mr. Armitage to carry off his wife! She felt that she never so cordially detested one of her own sex before. Several times during that evening Mr. Armitage glanced at the governess, wondering where he had seen that face before.

“You are not altogether a stranger to

me, I think?" he said to her at last. "I must have met you somewhere." Emily shivered. "Heaven forbid," she murmured to herself piously. But she forced herself to lift her eyes serenely to the keen ones bent upon her. "I am quite sure," she said, sweetly, "that I have no recollection of having seen you before. I think I must have a double, for I am so constantly being mistaken for someone else."

"I'd stake my life on it, I have seen and spoken to that girl before," said Mr. Armitage to his wife a little later on. "I remember her voice distinctly, that slow, sweet drawl. Do you know if she has ever been to Paris, Daphne?"

"No, the subject does not really interest me. I am not in the least interested in Miss Baillie, I can assure you."

This, however, did not deter Mr. Armitage from putting the question himself to Emily. The girl's heart sank within her.

"Once, and once only, I was in Paris," she said. "I was very young, and remember but little of the city."

"Ah! Then of course I must have been mistaken," said Mr. Armitage. But he was far from convinced that Emily was speaking the truth, and he was considerably annoyed that he could not recollect when and where he had seen her before.

## CHAPTER XXII.

It was very quiet after Daphne had gone. Peace settled down on the little household in West Kensington once more, and Constance was grateful for the respite. She was not feeling well, and she was terribly worried and troubled just now. Utterly unused to economy, she had outstripped her income, and, although it seemed almost impossible that she could have done so, seeing how few things she allowed herself outside the pale of necessities, the bills that came pouring in fairly staggered her. There was one for twenty pounds for Arthur's schooling that must be paid at once. And in something like despair she went down to Bedford Row. Mr. Bolder was in and genuinely glad to see her. His welcome was so cordial that Constance's heart smote her. She felt that she had neglected him of late. A little attention to the old man who had been so true and steadfast a friend both to her father and to herself was only what he might have expected and considered himself entitled to. Yet it was not until trouble stared her in the face that she thought of him.



In a little confusion she stated her errand. "I must dip into my capital, I suppose," she said, ruefully. "There is nothing else for it."

"A pity, a great pity! You will excuse my saying so, but indeed, my dear lady, you must try and live within your income. You ought to do so with perfect ease: the rent you are paying for your house is not large, and there is only yourself and your little girl."

"I must have servants—there are two—the work could not be done properly with less, and Eva has a governess now. It is true I do not pay her any salary, but she is an addition to the household, and, of course, I have to give her an occasional present. The fact is, I spent too much money at Scarborough this year."

Mr. Bolder took up the roll of bills she had laid on the table and looked through them in silence.

"I really cannot see anything here to find fault with," he said at last. "The only one that is at all heavy in proportion to your income is Messrs. Tulloch's account."

"The livery stables! Yes, my poor Judith has cost a great deal. I did not think a guinea a week too much when I made the agreement with them, but you

see that is only for the pony's actual keep. There are so many extras—cloths, sponges, the man's wages who grooms her and keeps the carriage in order. That is what makes it run up."

"I should advise your making some other arrangement; it is more than you ought to pay—actually more than Arthur's education costs."

"Yes—I—do you think I ought to dispense with a carriage of my own altogether?"

"I do. It seems hard to say so, but there is no disputing the fact that to keep a horse runs away with a lot of money; more, indeed, than you are justified in paying."

"Then I will sell her. Poor old Judith, I have really grown attached to her. It must be five or six years since Cyril bought her for my especial use, and she is a pretty creature."

"I wonder you ever thought of keeping her under your straitened circumstances," remarked the lawyer.

For the moment Constance had lost sight of the fact that both Judith and the carriage had been presents from Lord Hardstock. It would be ungracious to part with them. Something of this she tried to explain to Mr. Bolder.

"It will be awkward," she said.

"Not at all. Why should it be? Simply tell his lordship that you find it too expensive to keep a horse in town."

"But——" she hesitated ; the conviction strong upon her that Lord Hardstock would refuse to allow her to make any such sacrifice. "And I am under far too many obligations as it is," she told herself.

"Will you arrange the matter for me?" she asked the lawyer. "Sell them both and get what you can—it will go towards paying the bills."

"Yes, certainly I will do my best. But, my dear Mrs. Armitage, you are not to worry unnecessarily. There is really no cause for you to do so. Curtail your expenses as much as possible, and I think we can manage to get enough to pay off the most pressing of these bills without encroaching on your capital."

"How good you are!" Tears glittered in Constance's eyes.

Mr Bolder took her hands in his. "A little bird has whispered to me," he began "that Mrs. Armitage may win back her old home if she pleases."

"Then that little bird was misinformed." Constance spoke lightly, but she was much annoyed. Who could have spread such a

report? "The first year of my widowhood is not at an end yet," she added. "It is in bad taste to discuss the question at all."

"You must pardon me, I am only anxious for your future."

"I am sure of that, but now that we are on the subject, let me assure you that I have no warmer feeling for Lord Hardstock than regard and friendship, and that under no possible circumstances could what you have suggested ever come about."

He looked at her a little curiously. Evidently she was in earnest, and he was sorry for it. She was born for the smooth paths of life, and an adverse fate had jostled her on the rough highroad. If she could have brought herself to care for Lord Hardstock, everything might have been made so easy for her. And why not? His lordship was handsome, well-bred, and, the world said, a favourite with most of the gentler sex.

Judith was sold, and Constance actually shed a few tears over her old friend, when she gave her her last lump of sugar. She was connected with the old days of luxury and contentment, and, despite herself, the poor lady sighed a little wistfully.

Rebecca was very angry when she heard what her sister had done.

"I think it really unkind of you, Constance," she said. "If there was any real need for such a step—which I do not believe, let Mr. Bolder say what he pleases—you might have mentioned it to me."

The fact was that Mrs. Strangways dreaded what Lord Hardstock would say when the news came to his ears, as come it must, and after a good deal of reflection she made up her mind to break it to him herself. And she set about her task with the utmost diplomacy. Her forebodings were fully realized. Lord Hardstock was extremely angry. He felt that Constance, in treating his gift so unceremoniously, had wished to strike a blow at himself, and something of this sort he said to Mrs. Strangways.

Rebecca looked horrified.

"If you could but have heard what she said—poor Constance! She begged me to keep the knowledge from you, for 'I know his kind heart will prompt him to help me still further,' she said, 'And that must not be!'"

"Why not?" asked Lord Hardstock. "Dear Mrs. Strangways, as my friend, and knowing all I feel for Mrs. Armitage, could you not have hinted that my only desire is to place all I have at her disposal?"

"It is too soon. No one will win

Constance but by long patience and steadfastness. She has a curious nature, and although she is gentleness itself she is by no means pliable, and it is the most difficult matter to move her a hair's breadth from the line she has marked out for herself."

"Do you think she will see me if I call?"

"Why not?"

"Well, to speak frankly, she has never been quite the same to me since that unfortunate afternoon's business with Mrs. Gerald. I am sure she wishes me to understand that she is displeased. I have met her twice, once in your drawing-room, when she almost turned her back on me, and devoted herself to Admiral Horsford the whole time, and two days ago in Piccadilly. I hastened across the road to speak to her, but, I cannot but think, to avoid me, she immediately hailed an omnibus which was coming in the contrary direction, and got in."

Mrs. Strangways reflected in silence. At last she said:

"Constance does not bear animosity for long, and she dislikes quarrelling as much as you or I can do. Therefore, your better plan is to go boldly to Kensington and make your peace."

And Lord Hardstock took her advice.

Mrs. Armitage was not at home! For a moment he hesitated, and then, letting his annoyance get the better of him :

“Is she actually not in the house?” he asked. “Or have you received orders not to admit me?”

The girl looked surprised, as well she might.

“Oh, no, my lord! My mistress has never given me any such order, I assure you.”

And when Constance returned home and was informed of what had taken place, she bit her lip and devoutly wished that she had so instructed Phœbe, for she dreaded what Lord Hardstock might have to say on the subject of Judith. Within three or four days he called again, and this time subterfuge or excuse was out of the question, for Constance stood looking out of the window, and as he approached the house, of course, Lord Hardstock saw her

With fast-beating pulses and a nervous feeling upon her, which she felt wholly unable to overcome, she rose to greet him. She had no need to disquiet herself. Lord Hardstock had never been so agreeable. He touched lightly on the ordinary subjects of the day, asked after his little friend Eva,

and said that when Arthur came home he must be allowed to take him out occasionally, and then in quite a casual way, remarked :

“Awfully sorry you felt obliged to part with Judith, Mrs. Armitage.”

Constance drew a long breath of relief.

“My expenses are too heavy to allow of my keeping a horse,” she said.

“You are the best judge of that of course. I can only regret that you were compelled to do so.”

Struggling with herself, Constance tried to say something gracious. She felt that in common decency she must not let him think that she was wholly without gratitude.

“I was very fond of Judith,” she said. “In the first place I had had her so long. Then, too, there was the fear of giving you pain, as it was only through your great kindness that I got her back.” It was not quite what she had intended to say.

“Oh, Constance, surely you know,” began his lordship in a tone there was no mistaking, but at that moment, to her mother’s intense relief, Eva’s bright little face appeared at the door.

“Aren’t you ever coming, mamma? We’ve been ready for ever so long.” Then,



catching sight of the visitor—"Oh, come too, Lord Hardstock, we are all going shopping. I am to have a new hat."

"No, I don't fancy that the expedition would furnish much amusement to anyone but yourself, dear."

Eva clung to her mother's hand, evidently determined not to lose sight of her again.

"Which way are you going? If towards Oxford Street, perhaps I might be allowed to accompany you."

"We are going to take an omnibus which will put us down at Piccadilly Circus, and shall walk up Regent Street. If you do not despise that method of conveyance, by all means come too."

Whereupon Mrs. Armitage went away to put on her bonnet, and a minute or two later Miss Baillie came into the drawing-room.

"I am sent to entertain you," she said bitterly. "What a farce it all is! I am, oh, so weary of this life, Rupert."

It suited his purpose to be very gentle with her. Emily was infinitely more amenable to reason than when he resorted to a bullying tone, and Eva having rushed to the further end of the room, intent on investigating the contents of her mother's work-basket, he stooped and kissed the red lips.

“Some day!” he whispered.

“The lane of ‘some time’ runs into the road of ‘never,’” said she. “I am losing heart and faith and hope altogether.”

“And—love—as well, Emily?”

How much of tenderness and reproach he could throw into his eyes when he chose; Emily trembled and looked down.

“Why have you not been to see me all this week, my little darling? I waited for you on Tuesday, and again on Friday until late.”

It was not true, and perhaps she was not altogether beguiled into believing what he said. She wished she could believe in him. For with all her heart she loved him, and yearned for his affection in return.

“It is not always easy to get away. Mrs. Armitage had a headache, and I did not know whether you would expect me on Friday. When shall I come?”

“When you will. You are always welcome. You do not need that I should tell you that.”

But he did not specify any particular evening, and afterwards Emily remembered it.

Eva walked slowly and thoughtfully up to them, lifting her big blue eyes and surveying their faces with a puzzled expression on her own.

“Who do you love best,” she asked,  
“Miss Baillie or my mamma?”

Lord Hardstock laughed.

“Do you always love best the lady you are talking to?” persisted the child.

“My dear Eva, what a question! Why do you ask such funny things?”

“Because you look like this”—putting on a most exaggerated expression of anxiety and tenderness—“when you talk to mamma, and like this”—distorting her chubby features into a sentimental look that so enraged Miss Baillie that she caught the child by the hand and forcibly put her into a chair.

“Not another word,” she said, sternly.  
“Sit still. If you speak again we shall go out without you.”

But after that they could only talk on the most ordinary topics until Mrs. Armitage came down equipped for her walk.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

It never once occurred to Lord Hardstock that he was acting in a dastardly way towards Miss Baillie. Indeed, he would have been positively angry had anyone presumed to suggest as much to him. It was purely a game of give-and-take, looking at it from his point of view. Emily had permitted his advances, and had not only responded to, but sought them, had deliberately laid herself out to entrap him; and, if the fish objected to swallow the bait, why, the angler only had herself to thank for it.

The reader will not have followed Lord Hardstock so far without having gauged his moral depth, and realised that his standpoint of female excellence was a very low one, and yet there was something about Constance Armitage that appealed to the better, nobler man within him, and which, had she reciprocated his attachment, might have gone far towards redeeming him.

But when a woman is wearied of a man it is but a short step to hatred and disgust, and long ago, in the old days at Greystone,

his presence was irksome to her—irksome and distasteful. She asked herself sometimes why the feeling was so strong within her, for he had his good points. He was more attractive than nine out of every ten of the men she had met in society, he was clever, and he was undeniably good-looking.

“But,” Constance used to say, “I don’t trust him ; he is not sincere.”

At all events he was sincere enough in his love for her, but even that failed to work in his favour, since Constance would have none of his love. With a little shock she realised that he had come very near a declaration that last afternoon, and, at all hazards, he must have no such opportunity given to him again.

“He must know that I could give him but one answer,” she thought to herself.

But somehow a man can be very obtuse on such points, and having made up his own mind to a certain course of action, his lordship felt that it only required a judicious expenditure of time and patience to attain his ends. He had displayed a good deal of tact and diplomacy during the last six months, and he felt he ought to have his reward.

Arthur came home for his holidays in August and, by being kind to the lad,

Lord Hardstock strove to ingratiate himself with his mother, but beyond expressing her thanks for the trouble he took, Constance did not appear to be in any way impressed, and the boy himself, oddly enough, despite his lordship's gifts and the many sights he took him to see, was not in the least attached to him. He had inherited his mother's keen insight into motive, and considerably startled her one day by asking point blank :

"Why does Lord Hardstock take me about so much, mamma? I am sure he is frightfully bored the whole time, and does not enjoy it a bit. Have you asked him to do it?"

"No, my boy; I suppose it is because he likes giving pleasure to young people."

Arthur laughed sceptically.

"I don't think so, mamma. The other day, I heard him say to his friend, Captain Dashwood, that it was a confounded nuisance having to trot a young cub about, and Captain Dashwood said something about him — Lord Hardstock — having turned 'bear-leader.'"

Constance looked angry.

"You shall not go out with him again," she said quickly.

Boy-like, Arthur had fallen in love with his sister's governess. Emily's beauty had

made a tremendous impression upon him, and he became her most devoted slave, and Emily, who despised no offering, however humble, at beauty's shrine, amused herself with him.

He was bright and clever, but being older than Eva he had more tact, and refrained from the outspoken remarks and ill-timed frankness that made her a child to be feared and avoided. He was now nine years old, and precocious for his years.

"Miss Baillie," he said one day, as he rested his curly head against her shoulder, "you're not very kind to Dr. Dale. I wish you would be. He is so nice."

Two days after Arthur left school, he had managed to sprain his thumb, and Mrs. Armitage sent him round to the surgery, whereupon he then and there struck up a friendship with the Doctor, and had been invited once or twice to tea.

"I hope I am always polite to everybody," returned Miss Baillie demurely.

"But he has asked you to go with me next Wednesday, and you won't go."

"No, dear. I would rather not."

"You'll change your mind—ladies always do—it's their *provocation*, I heard mamma say so."

"Don't you think you mean 'prerogative?'"

"Oh, well, yes, perhaps you are right. I can't know everything right away, anyhow. Miss Baillie," he added coaxingly, "do come on Wednesday. It's no end jolly. We play dominoes, Miss Janet and I, and whoever wins gets a box of chocolates."

"Very exciting, I must say."

"Yes, isn't it? Then you will come."

The lad jumped up with alacrity "I'll go right round and tell the Doctor. He'll be so glad."

"You will do no such thing, Arthur; sit down." Miss Baillie pushed him back on his chair. "Now tell me exactly, word for word, what the Doctor said to you. Did he bid you ask me?"

"No—not that. What he said was—let me see—'It is too bad Miss Baillie won't join us. You must try what you can do to persuade her, my boy' That was all."

"And what did Miss Janet say?"

"Oh, she wasn't there."

"Well, when she sends me a proper invitation, I'll think about it."

At that moment the door opened to admit Mrs. Armitage and Eva, who was in a state of wild excitement.

"Oh, Miss Baillie," she cried, "we have just met the Doctor, and I'm to go as well as Arthur on Wednesday."



"The Doctor made such a point of it I could hardly refuse," said Constance. "You will not mind going with them, Miss Baillie?"

"I am invited, then?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Oh, I see. I am to accompany them as their governess?"

There was so much hurt pride in Emily's tone that Constance bit her lip, and was at a loss what to say. This ultra-sensitive-ness Miss Baillie chose to parade of late was awkward to deal with. "I have no doubt you will receive a written invitation," she said at last.

And she proved correct. That very evening brought a note from Janet Dale which, if not very warm, was at all events courteous enough.

Her brother and herself would be delighted if Miss Baillie would give them the pleasure of her company on the following Wednesday. A grim smile crossed Emily's face.

"I expect poor Janet had a *mauvais quart d'heure* before she was driven into writing this," thought she.

At all events it promised a change of scene and surroundings, and she gladdened Arthur's heart by showing him the letter of acceptance.

And when the evening came she dressed

herself with more care and taste than she usually displayed, although it was only a black lace dress she wore, with a spray of scarlet geranium in her bodice.

Eva, all in white, with a new blue sash and kid shoes to match, was dancing about first on one leg and then on the other, for full half-an-hour before it was time to start. Arthur, with quite an air, offered his arm as soon as the hall door shut, and to compromise matters, Miss Baillie put her hand on his shoulder, and so the little party arrived at the Doctor's door.

It was really a very pleasant evening. Miss Dale was either too well-bred, or she stood too much in awe of her brother, to allow her real feelings to rise to the surface, and, if a trifle glacial, was evidently desirous of giving no cause of offence.

Vivian Dale was not yet cured of his fancy for the governess. His hand trembled when it touched that of Emily, and his eyes rested on her hungrily. Not until just before they were taking leave did she find herself alone with him. Janet had taken Eva upstairs to tie her hat on, and Arthur was looking over a book of engravings. A spirit of coquetry seized Emily.

"Do you never think of me now?" she asked, lifting her bright eyes to his.

"You know I do. Oh! in that way, you mean? Never again. I do not dare to risk it."

She laughed merrily, a silvery trill like a child's laugh. "Nonsense. I do not believe you have any influence over me now—it has worn off by this time—take my hand in yours—I feel nothing." Her fingers closed round his as she spoke, affecting him magnetically.

"In some cases I believe the power is entirely apart from contact," he said, striving hard for composure.

"Oh!" She drew her red lips together with an arch expression.

"If propinquity has much to answer for, contact has more, for it has slain its tens of thousands. I do not believe in any mesmeric influence without it."

She grew agitated, a thrill ran through her; against her will she lifted her eyes, impelled by a power stronger than herself.

Slowly the Doctor's lips formed the one word—Emily.

In another second she would have been in his arms, unable to struggle against his mastery over her, but with a swift movement he turned away and walked deliberately out of the room.

"Why, you are crying, Miss Baillie?"

Arthur was at her side in dismay. She

put up her hands to her face, for the tears were raining down her cheeks.

"Is it toothache?" he asked, and in a second had flown to the door. "Doctor!" he cried, but the Doctor put him aside.

"Drink this," he said to Emily, holding a glass to her lips.

It was sal-volatile, and in a few minutes she was herself again; and when Eva and Miss Dale came back to them she seemed much as usual. But at parting she overlooked the Doctor's outstretched hand and, with a bend of her head, passed him. And when she found herself in the street she drew a long breath—something between a gasp and a sob.

"I will not see him again," she told herself angrily. "It is horrible that he should influence me in this way."

But despite herself her thoughts centred themselves upon him, and when she fell asleep that night she dreamed a strange dream. She was bound hand and foot, at the mercy of a monster half-beast, half-human—with the body of a lion and the features of the man she loved—Lord Hardstock.

Feeling that her last moment was at hand, she sent forth a pitiful cry for help, and on the instant Vivian Dale appeared sword in hand, and with one quick stroke laid the monster dead at her feet. "You

are mine—mine!” he whispered tenderly as he severed the cords about her wrists—and she woke, hot and panting, and for long hours tossed and turned, too restless and disquieted for sleep.

Early in September Mrs. Strangways had a serious illness. The drains were all wrong in Clarges Street, and Rebecca was among the first to suffer.

For more than a week she was in great danger, and it was another fortnight before she was permitted to leave the house, and then she went straight to Kensington to be nursed by her sister.

Dyne had been devotion itself. Night and day she was by her mistress's side, and few would have suspected her of the depth of feeling she displayed.

But “still waters run deep,” and under a rough exterior the old woman carried a grateful heart. Mrs. Strangways had been a kind mistress to her, and she herself was one of the good old class so fast dying out nowadays. She respected and looked up to those in a higher position, and would freely have laid down her life for her mistress. But when Mrs. Strangways began to mend, poor Dyne broke down. The long hours and want of exercise and fresh air had told upon her. Nature asserted herself, and she took to her bed.

"The minute she can be moved she shall come to us," cried Constance, who fully appreciated the old creature's devotion.

And when Rebecca was just able to crawl down-stairs and, looking very wan and the ghost of her old energetic self, lie for an hour or two on the sofa in the drawing-room, Dyne made her appearance among them, more of a shadow even than her mistress, her thin hatchet-like face pinched and white, and her eyes set darkly in their sockets.

"You are to go straight to your own room and stop there, Dyne," said Mrs. Armitage, kindly.

"Oh, ma'am, if you please, I couldn't think of it. I've come here to nurse my mistress."

"No such thing. Your share of the nursing is over. Everything is prepared for you, and for a whole week, and longer if necessary, you are to be waited upon and not stir a finger. Do you hear me, Dyne? I can be very severe when I like."

"Oh, ma'am, begging your pardon, that's what I'm sure you never couldn't be. And such kindness as this I never see in all my born days."

Dyne was on the verge of tears.

But though the spirit was willing the flesh was too weak for her to resist, and

she was glad enough to creep away by-and-by and lay her aching bones in the comfortable bed provided for her.

"I never heard such a fuss about a servant," sneered Emily, who detested Dyne every whit as much as the old woman disliked her, and she forcibly prevented Eva from running into the old servant's room as she would have liked to do.

Dyne had a marvellous store of fairy tales for the little folk, and she and Eva were famous friends.

"Dyne, you're not pretty to look at," she confided one day, with her usual happy straightforwardness, "but you have a beautiful mind."

## CHAPTER XXIV.

ARTHUR did not get the outing that he hoped for. The whole of Constance's time was taken up with the invalids, and I doubt if anybody, unless it were Miss Baillie, was sorry when the last days of his holidays came.

"It's a shame!" he grumbled. "Mother said I should go to Brighton."

"Illness is a thing no one can prevent," answered Emily. "I am sure you have been very happy at home. You forget how often Lord Hardstock took you out."

The boy was silent. Of late his lordship had not been so constant a visitor. The house was so dull, and the little drawing-room so crowded, that he had no chance of seeing Mrs. Armitage alone, or of saying a word that would not be overheard. Almost invariably Emily was present—a strip of needlework in hand which never advanced by so much as an inch, but which gave her an excuse for keeping her eyes downbent, and long experience had taught her that she could see more of what was going on around her from under the long dark



lashes than by reading the faces of the speakers.

That quiet figure (for unless addressed she rarely spoke) gave Lord Hardstock a creepy sort of feeling. She was like some avenging spirit, ready to pounce upon a stray word and bring the culprit to justice.

No, until the Kensington establishment had returned to its accustomed ways, he felt he was better apart.

So now when Miss Baillie referred to his lordship's kindness, Arthur said nothing.

"It is not every gentleman who would care to be bothered by a boy of your age, you know, Arthur." Emily was nettled.

"No, and I am wondering what his reason was," said the lad quietly.

"What should be his motive? Good gracious, Arthur, if you analyse things so closely already, what will you be by the time you are thirty? Simply objectionable!"

"I don't like Lord Hardstock."

"Then you are a most ungrateful boy"

Emily was very angry. "I should not like him to know that all his trouble has been thrown away upon you," she said.

"I don't care a straw whether he knows it or not."

After this there was a slight cooling of

Arthur's devotion. And altogether, perhaps, he was not quite so sorry as he might have been when the term commenced again.

"I want to see you. Be here at nine sharp."

So ran the little strip of paper over which Miss Baillie knitted her level brows. It was peremptory. It said as plainly as it could speak, "It is for me to order and for you to obey." And yet, because it came from Lord Hardstock she never thought of complaining. The only thing that troubled her was how she was to get away.

Mrs. Strangways had restless nights, rarely sleeping until early morning, and Constance usually read aloud to her until half-past eight, when Miss Baillie would take her place and continue until ten, or even half-past. Sometimes the invalid would doze and then wake refreshed.

Emily's voice was sweet and monotonous. It more often lulled Rebecca to sleep than her sister's clearer tones.

How was she to escape the evening's duty? "It will look strange if I ask to go out, and I really can't have a headache again. I am always having headaches. Anyone but Mrs. Armitage would have smelt a rat long ago."

"My dear, is your throat painful?" asked Constance, as they sat down to luncheon. Emily's neck was encircled by a strip of red flannel.

"It is—I fear I am going to have quinsy."

Constance was troubled.

"You must have perfect rest," she said. "I will keep our little chatterbox with me this afternoon. Upon my word, Rebecca," turning to her sister, "I never was conscious how lamentably ignorant I was on most points, until I had Eva to question me. You would never credit the extraordinary things she asks."

"You should do as I do," Mrs. Strangeways said with a smile. "When she asks me, 'Auntie Becky, what is this, or what is that?' I answer, 'Gimcracks for meddlers.' It is a magnificent answer. She never asks me any more."

"I should think not," said Constance, indignantly. "That is no answer at all. How are the poor children to get information if no one will take the trouble to tell them things?"

Miss Baillie kept her room and thoroughly enjoyed herself. At seven o'clock she put Eva to bed, and at half-past eight was ready, equipped for her journey. She did not reach home till long

past ten, and on putting her latch-key into the door, found to her consternation that it would not turn. What in the world was she to do? There were lights in the drawing-room, so Mrs. Armitage was still up.

"I must trust to chance," said Emily, as she raised the knocker and let it fall, in a half-hearted way.

In a couple of minutes steps came along the hall, and the chain was put down. The door opened a couple of inches, and Dyne's forbidding - looking face peered forth.

"Holy Virgin!" said she, and promptly shut it again. Emily could hear her pattering down the hall.

At the end of her patience she pulled the bell violently, giving a loud rat-a-tat-tat at the same time.

She was left waiting outside for the best part of five minutes, and then once more the door swung open.

Emily was in the hall and running up the staircase before Dyne realised what had happened. She caught hold of her cloak and tried to stop her.

"Poor little Miss Eva!" she gasped.

"What!" A great dread seized Emily.

"That unlucky bairn!" Without much circumlocution Dyne told her tale. Eva, it appeared, had either woke up frightened,

or had been walking in her sleep ; at all events she had fallen headlong down a flight of stairs, narrowly escaping fracturing her skull, and frightening her mother into a terrible state of fears and nervousness. Miss Baillie walked up to the nursery. On a low chair sat Mrs. Armitage with the child on her lap.

"Where have you been?" she asked, sternly.

"My head ached so much, I thought the air would do me good, so I went for a walk."

"Why did you lock your door?"

"I do not care that the servants should pry about. My drawers and boxes have been repeatedly opened and overhauled, and I now make a point of locking my door always."

"For the future I must ask you to simply lock your drawers and boxes, and leave your door open. I consider it a very great liberty to have taken."

Never had Emily seen Mrs. Armitage so seriously displeased.

She was terribly discomposed, for his lordship had faithfully promised that in the early autumn he would redeem his promise and make her his wife, and it would anger him fearfully if she lost her home with Mrs. Armitage through her own shortcomings.

So she rallied her forces, and exhibited an anxiety about her little pupil which was admirably feigned, for she would dearly like to have shaken her for being the cause of the present bother.

“My poor darling!” she cried.

Eva looked up languidly. She lay very white and still on her mother’s bosom.

“Let me take her, dear Mrs. Armitage; your arms must ache.”

But Constance was not to be mollified. Emily had thrown back her cloak, and to her surprise she saw that she wore a dress cut slightly open at the neck, and had discarded the flannel wrap she had worn at luncheon.

“I am glad to see that your throat is better,” she remarked.

“I cannot think what is the matter with me,” said Emily; “it is very strange. First my throat was swollen, and then the pain left it and went to my head. I felt almost distracted. You—you will not be angry at what has been purely accidental, I am sure? I have never neglected Eva for an instant. Indeed, I love her too well for that. But if——”

It seemed to Constance that her grief was genuine, and her womanly heart was touched.

“If I have been hasty you must forgive

me," she replied. "I have been so extremely anxious about my darling, that perhaps I have not made the allowances I should have done at any other time, and you will admit that it did look strange, and appearances were somewhat against you—your door locked, and instead of being in bed as you had given us to understand, that you should have been out of doors."

"And yet it can all be so easily explained."

"Yes, I am ready and willing to believe that. Now I think if you will help us, we had better carry Eva into my room. I will keep her with me altogether to-night."

The child looked up gratefully into her mother's face. With an ugly scowl Emily closed the door and went off to her own room. On the landing she met Dyne.

"Can I help you to pack, Miss?"

"Have you taken leave of your senses, woman? Why should I want to pack at this time of night?"

"Aren't you going then?"

"Going! Stand aside! I can't stay here talking to an old fool."

With this she stepped past Dyne, unlocked her door and banged it sharply after her.

"Wait awhile, my fine leddy! We'll see which is the bigger of we two fules, by-and-by."

Little Eva was terribly shaken by her fall. The next morning Emily learned that Dr. Dale had been sent for immediately the accident occurred, and that he was in the house when her own absence was discovered, and she felt that some sort of explanation would have to be given him.

Altogether things were not very roseate for Miss Baillie. In a becoming gown of soft fawn cashmere she received the doctor.

"All this is terrible," she cooed. "I shall feel afraid to leave the house for the future, and be worrying myself the whole time, lest anything should be going wrong."

"It is a pity that you should make such late visits, don't you think?"

The significance in his tone warned Miss Baillie that she must be judicious.

"I was not feeling well," she replied tersely, "and so went out for a walk. I am at a loss to see why Dr. Dale should make it his province to dictate to me."

"I should certainly not presume to dictate. I merely offered a suggestion."

"Thank you, I am perfectly competent to conduct my own affairs."

"Emily!"

"Oh, how funnily you say that!" cried Eva from the sofa. Her eyes were fixed on her governess and the doctor, and she was



drinking in every word. "Emily!" She put her head on one side, and lisped forth in the most lachrymose tone imaginable. It was impossible not to laugh, and so the ice was broken, and gradually matters assumed a more friendly aspect.

"But it was a near shave," Emily told herself. "Touch-and-go with Mrs. Armitage, and—all but—good-bye to my solitary adorer."

The lesson was taken to heart. Emily paid no more evening visits to Lord Hardstock's rooms, and that individual was considerably alarmed when he heard of the chapter of accidents.

No, they must risk nothing more, he agreed. And so, once again poor Emily was doomed to be parted from the man she loved. But this time it was not so hard to bear. She felt sure—so very sure that things were drawing to a climax, and that in a few short months she would be Lady Hardstock. It was well worth a little sacrifice, she reflected with a sigh.

It must have been two or even three days later that the thought suddenly occurred to her that she had not destroyed the little slip of paper which had fixed their last rendezvous, and she grew somewhat uneasy when it was nowhere to be found. She could not have been so incon-

ceivably careless as to have dropped it anywhere? Her heart beat thick and fast at the bare idea. She was positive that she had not torn it up, and it was not in her desk, or among her papers. Where, then, was it? It was long before Miss Emily solved the knotty point.

Going slowly downstairs after the insulting remarks Miss Baillie had hurled at her, Dyne's quick eye caught a gleam of something white. It was half a sheet of paper, and Emily had dropped it.

Dyne had not long to wait. Revenge fell quickly to her hand, and she had been less than human had she not rejoiced.

## CHAPTER XXV.

MRS. STRANGWAYS had gone back to Clarges Street, accompanied by the faithful Dyne, and most unfeignedly glad was her husband. He had seen but little of her during her sojourn in Kensington, and unattractive as Rebecca was in many ways, she possessed the admirable faculty, which many a wiser woman lacked, of making the place where she dwelt "home," and herself the ruling spirit thereof. Nothing was the same while she was absent. Mr. Strangways missed her at every turn. She suited him, and, depend upon it, that is the one thing essential to married life. A man soon grows tired of a pretty face, however pleasing. The eye accustoms itself to charms of person and expression, until they are no longer recognisable, but the woman who studies her husband's tastes, and lays herself out to please him, binds him to her by the very closest of ties, and establishes a claim upon him that will never be weakened. Nor is the reason far to seek: she appeals to the inherent selfishness of his nature, and in so doing wins his heart. He needs her, and learns to rely on her

ready sympathy and companionship. She is his second self, part and parcel of his being, and he knows that she will never fail him.

Something of this dawned upon Constance as she watched the meeting between husband and wife. Mr Strangways had never been a demonstrative man, and after the many years of married life which he and Rebecca had spent side by side, rhapsodies would have been out of place, but his eye rested on her with the tenderest devotion, and there was a settled look of contentment on his face that spoke more plainly than words could have done of his joy at her return.

"That is a love any woman might be proud of winning," Constance told herself, "and yet Rebecca is not a woman whom one would expect to inspire devotion in a man. She is brusque in her manner, there is nothing soft or womanly about her, but she makes him a good wife and he appreciates her at her true value."

She sighed. Her own marriage had been such an utter failure, and she was more than half inclined to reproach herself for a good deal of the wretchedness.

"I was not wise. I exacted too much. I am afraid that I showed too plainly that my love for him no longer existed, and yet,

God knows, I really cared for him when we were first married. He drove me from him. A woman cannot go on loving a man whose every action proves him mean and contemptible." And at the memory of Cyril Armitage's suspicions of her own unfaithfulness, she even now felt enraged.

"What had I ever done to merit such insults?" she said, pitifully. "But I ought never to have left my home; I can see that now. Not even at his bidding. In the eyes of the world I should merely have seemed the guilty creature he said I was. I must have been mad. It seems like a dream now."

And then her thoughts centred themselves on Basil St. Quentin. What was the reason of his long silence? It was unlike him. Her lip quivered and her eyes filled with tears. "I am a lonely woman, and I have no friends," she reflected, sadly. "The fault must be in myself, I fear. People do not take to me."

Slumbrous August had given place to golden September, and that in its turn had waned, and October was now far advanced. Life flowed on uneventfully enough in Kensington. The anniversary of Cyril Armitage's death came and passed.

"You will lighten your mourning,

Constance? No one wears weeds longer than a twelvemonth," remarked Rebecca, who dearly loved to be correct in all things, even to the width of a hem or the stitching of a handkerchief.

"Is it worth while?" Constance asked listlessly.

"Of course it is," she answered briskly "You ought not to wear crape a day longer. It makes you look older, I think. You are changed lately somehow, and I believe you are thinner than you were."

Constance did not answer. She really felt no interest in her appearance or her personal adornment. She had never cared about dress, and now less than ever

"You are an odd woman," said Rebecca, regarding her critically "Although we are sisters, and I may be presumed to know more about you than anybody else, you often puzzle me."

Constance knew that she was tacitly returning to Lord Hardstock, though she had not actually mentioned his name. It angered her to feel how anxious Rebecca was that she should make a second marriage.

"It is a matter that concerns myself and no other living soul. I am certainly quite old enough to know my own mind, and I absolutely decline to be coerced, or even

advised on the subject," she reflected with a good deal of annoyance. She was determined that he should not be discussed, and adroitly turned the conversation, displaying an anxiety and eagerness about her wardrobe that she was very far from feeling.

"I believe I am growing a regular old frump," she said, with a laugh. "The first time you go out, Rebecca, you shall drive me to Wimpole Street, and we will interview Madame Eugénie, and she shall make me a new dress."

Mrs. Strangways took great praise to herself that she had roused her sister to a proper regard for appearances.

"She just shuts herself up with that troublesome child, until, upon my word, there will be no getting her out of her shell at all, presently. It is not good for her, and she shan't do it either. A young and pretty woman leading a nun's life—it is unnatural. She has got into a morbid state, and wants shaking up, and I am just the proper person to do it."

Rebecca felt she could fight valiantly in a good cause.

But it was very difficult to persuade Mrs. Armitage to go into society. To please Rebecca she accepted one or two invitations, but she was not happy.

"I seem to have outlived all that sort of thing," she said to her sister. "I would much rather have been at home with Eva."

But that was exactly what Rebecca complained of and was resolved not to allow. "My dear Constance, everyone seemed so pleased to see you. I don't know what more you could expect or wish for."

So she yielded and, to please her sister, accepted an invitation to dine at Dr. Protheroe's. And there she really did find amusement and spent a pleasant evening. The kindly doctor scolded her for not having been to see them before.

"Eleanor would be so pleased if you would come sometimes," he said.

"Indeed, it is from no want of kindly feeling either to you or your daughter," returned Constance, "but West Kensington is a long way off, and I rarely pay visits, except to my sister."

"She ought not to be such a recluse," said Rebecca, who had caught a word or two. "Talk to her, Dr. Protheroe; she is very obstinate and will not listen to me."

"Mrs. Strangways was always much fonder of society than I. Having lived so long in the country has something to do with it, I dare say, but I confess I feel out of my element in crowded rooms," said Constance, with a smile.



"Come and dine quietly with us sometimes, that is all I ask," said the doctor. "I can fully sympathise with your dislike of the form of entertainment one is invited to now-a-days. Fuss and glitter do not commend themselves to me any more than to yourself. There is a hollow insincerity and love of display and show that is eminently distasteful, but since you must eat your dinner somewhere, come and join us now and then."

"Thank you, I will." Constance spoke heartily, and made up her mind to see more of the doctor and his daughter, for they were simple, unaffected folk, although Dr Protheroe was a very popular man and ranked high in his profession. Christmas was near at hand, when a letter from her brother-in-law upset all Mrs. Armitage's plans.

Gerald wrote begging that she would pay them a visit.

Daphne had made some most undesirable acquaintances, and—"I seem to have lost all influence over her," he said. "You are the only person who can control and guide her. She would always listen to you. I dread to think what the consequences may be if this intimacy is not put an immediate stop to." He mentioned no names, and Constance was quite in the clouds as to

what was the nature of the danger he apprehended. But that it was very real and might even be serious she could not fail to glean from his urgent letter, and felt that if it could be possibly arranged, she ought to go. But it was awkward.

Mrs. Strangways would be extremely annoyed. In an unlucky moment she had agreed to go to Clarges Street on Christmas Eve and remain until after the New Year, and ever since she had made the promise she had regretted it, for old Dyne had given her to understand that Lord Hardstock was to spend a few days there, and she felt that she had been cheated and tricked. Her sister knew perfectly well that of her own free will she would not be thrown with Lord Hardstock for any length of time, and in arranging this visit Constance could not but feel that she had a motive and was playing into his lordship's hands. But although, when she read her brother-in-law's letter she felt almost as relieved as a child let off a whipping that she had a legitimate excuse for breaking her agreement, she dreaded telling Rebecca, for she knew how very wrathful she would be.

Rebecca had never been so nonplussed in her life. Indignation kept her tongue-tied. It was a good deal as Constance had

guessed. She had, out of pity and compassion for Lord Hardstock, invited him to remain over Christmas beneath their roof, and thus given him a chance to urge his suit, and the disappointment and chagrin in store for him weighed heavily with her own annoyance.

She could not accuse Constance of any wish to evade her hospitality, for she had seen a part of Mr. Armitage's letter, and knew that it was *bonâ fide* enough; besides Mrs. Armitage never condescended to these little meannesses. She would have said "No" in so many words had she not wished to go. And of course Mrs. Strangeways never supposed for an instant that Dyne had betrayed her plans in reference to Lord Hardstock. There was nothing to be done but to put a good face on the matter.

"I do think it is too bad," she cried, indignantly. "So near to Christmas, and when everything was settled. It is a horrible time of year for travelling, but of course Gerald never thinks of that. He is far too engrossed with his own selfish wishes to remember your comfort. Why on earth did he marry that little Will o' the Wisp if he hasn't got sense enough to exert some sort of authority over her? I call it rank folly to go over to Paris, but of

course you will please yourself, Constance." Yes, Constance would do that, and she elected to go.

One thing she did ask at Rebecca's hands.

"Poor little Eva will be so dull and lonely without me; will you let her and Miss Baillie come to you for a few days?" she said.

And with somewhat mixed feelings Emily found that it was arranged that they were to go to Clarges Street on Tuesday night and remain until Saturday or Monday. At first she felt inclined to refuse, or take a holiday on her own account, where she would be free to do as she liked, and might see more of her lover than she could hope to do in Clarges Street, but Eva confided the fact that Lord Hardstock was going to stop at Auntie Becky's—he had told her so, and promised to show her some juggling tricks, and after that Emily came to the conclusion that if there was any chance of Rupert remaining under the same roof with herself, her wiser course was to go to Mrs. Strangways'

She did not dare to make enquiries as to the extent of Eva's information, but——

"If he told the child so, I expect it is true," she thought. "I'll take my chance at all events."

So she listened to Mrs. Armitage's instructions about what Eva was to wear, and received her orders respecting the servants amicably enough, and even offered to help Constance to pack, an attention which was refused. Constance would take but little luggage with her, for she hoped she should be home again by the end of a fortnight at latest.

This time she sent no friendly little missive to her old friend, to prepare him for her coming visit.

"No," she said, "since he has not chosen to answer either of my letters it is impossible that I can write again."

But she knew that she would see him, and the knowledge brought a glow about her heart and a springiness to her step, and sent her with a sort of suppressed excitement and eagerness to make her preparations.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

PERHAPS Daphne was not quite so cordial in her welcome as on the last occasion of her sister-in-law's visit.

She did not know until the last moment that she was coming. Gerald was nervously afraid that she would guess what had brought Constance. Let wilful Daphne once suspect that she had come to further Gerald's schemes and separate her from her new friends, and there would be war to the knife.

"In that case it would have been infinitely better that she had never left England," reflected Mr. Armitage.

However, Daphne did not suspect any double dealing. She merely looked upon it as an awkward coincidence that Constance should have elected to come to Paris just now when, as she herself expressed it, "she was having such a jolly time of it."

Madame de Maupas was a young widow, living in the Rue St. Honoré, not overloaded with means, and spending every penny of her income on dress and amusement.

The little ménage consisted of three persons, Madame de Maupas herself, her half-sister Angèle, and Monsieur Raoul, her brother-in-law, an extremely attractive and fascinating young Frenchman, and he it was who threatened to prove dangerous to Mr. Armitage's peace of mind. Daphne had made acquaintance with the trio at the house of the English clergyman, and there was hardly a day that she did not pay a visit to the Rue St. Honoré.

Mr. Armitage had attached no importance to it at first. Daphne must have friends, and although Madame de Maupas was not exactly the type of woman he would have chosen as a companion for her, there was not much to cavil at. She was perhaps a little loud, and she laughed too frequently and showed her dazzling white teeth, and she had many mannerisms which he considered objectionable, but still, meeting her as they had done at Mr. St. John's, she must of necessity be irreproachable. Little did he suspect that that afternoon was the sole occasion on which Madame de Maupas had crossed Mr. St. John's threshold, and that they knew nothing whatever about her or her antecedents.

It was not until nearly a month later that, coming home somewhat unexpectedly in the forenoon, he found his wife singing

duets with an extremely handsome young Frenchman, and learned for the first time that Madame de Maupas had a brother-in-law.

Daphne tossed her head rebelliously when questioned as to her reticence in the matter.

"If this young man lives with Madame de Maupas you must have seen him constantly?"

"Of course I have. How foolish you are! Am I then never to speak to a man?"

"I must say I cannot understand why you have never mentioned him before."

"Oh, what does it signify? I suppose I did not give it a thought."

The air of profound indifference she displayed strengthened his conviction, and when he found she was running round to Madame de Maupas' on every possible occasion, he began to grow most uneasy. By this time he had learned that Daphne was not to be trusted.

She was giddy, vain, determined to be admired, and not over-scrupulous about the means she employed to accomplish her ends.

To his hints that he did not approve of her intimacy with Madame de Maupas, she remained mute, and when at last he forbade



her to go so often to the Rue St. Honoré, she burst into tears and sulked for three days.

Espionage in any form was distasteful to him. He could not possibly stoop to watch his wife. He had given his orders most imperatively, and could only hope that she would obey them, but he could extract no promise from her to that effect.

"They are my friends," she sobbed, passionately "I do not see why I am to be prevented from going to see them."

And when, thinking to please her, he bought her tickets for the theatre, she flung them into the fire.

Just at first she was awed into submission, for Gerald declared that, if she did not break off her connection with these people, he should take her from Paris altogether into the country, where she would see no one.

"I should run away," she flashed out. "I will never, never live in the country."

"Daphne, can you really be the same loving girl I married!" The grave rebuke in his tone wakened a little remorse within her. Her bosom heaved, and the drops gathered and ran down her cheeks.

"You are always so cross," she cried. "You are not a bit the same as you used to be either. If I am changed, you have changed still more."

And when he did not speak, wondering in what words he could assure her how dear she was to him still, and beg of her to act as he would have her, she suddenly ran out of the room and into her own, and locked the door against him.

But now that Constance had come, all would be well. Her advice was what poor Daphne needed, and she would certainly be swayed by it. But it promised to be more difficult than either of them had anticipated.

Daphne made not the slightest reference in any way to her new friends, and as Constance was supposed to be in ignorance of their existence, she, of course, could not broach the subject. Mr. Armitage bethought him of a plan that would at once mollify his wife, and afford an introduction to his *bête noire*, for Constance.

"Daphne," he said, as they sat at dinner a day or two after Mrs. Armitage's arrival, "we will have a musical evening, if you like, while Constance is here."

"We know no one who sings or plays," she demurred.

"Nonsense—that young de Maupas—surely he sings?"

"Oh yes, but I thought you objected to the whole family?" said Daphne, raising her eyebrows and looking mildly astonished.

Gerald was conscious of some little inconsistency. "I do not object to an ordinary acquaintance, dear, only to an inordinate intimacy."

"Oh!" cried Daphne, folding her arms demurely. "Will you tell me where one ends and the other begins?" she added, and Constance was surprised to hear the pert tone she adopted.

"Now, Constance," she said, appealing to her sister-in-law, "you shall be umpire; we will abide by your verdict; you are a woman of the world, which Gerald is kind enough to say that I am not; how often may friends see each other and steer clear of—what is it?—'inordinate intimacy?'"

"Really, I don't think I could say without a close acquaintance with the subject under discussion. Who are the friends, Daphne?"

She had now led up to the point, and as Gerald took the earliest opportunity of slipping from the room, there was no restraint upon Daphne's eloquence.

"Who is Madame de Maupas?"

"Who is she? A lady. She has no profession that I am aware of," she answered, flippantly.

"What is her brother?"

"I don't know."

"They all speak English, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, I don't know where I should be if they didn't. Everybody talks so fast in French, I can't make out what they say. At school they spoke slowly and properly, and then it was quite easy."

On this score Constance could fully sympathise. For full half-an-hour Daphne rattled on. "Madame de Maupas was charming, so very full of fun, like a girl; and Angèle?—yes, she was pleasant too, but not to be compared with her sister."

"And Monsieur Raoul?" asked Constance, tentatively, "is he enamoured of Mademoiselle Angèle?"

Daphne looked down with a confused smile on her face.

"Now what put that into your head, I wonder? No; most certainly not. Nothing would please Angèle better."

"He is as charming as the others, I conclude?"

"You shall see him and judge for yourself," laughed Daphne, who was not to be cajoled into airing her opinions too openly.

"The hateful trio," as Gerald dubbed them, duly arrived on the following Thursday evening, and Daphne, in a bewildering costume of rose pink and creamy lace, fluttered about in a state of excitement.

There was no repose about Daphne; she

was absolutely unable to remain quiet for long at any time; but to-night it seemed to Constance that there was a repressed fervour and nervousness about her that was unusual. She hardly addressed a word to Raoul de Maupas, which in itself was a bad sign, but once Constance intercepted a look between them that seemed to imply a thorough understanding. Three or four guests had arrived, besides the de Maupas', when the door opened once more, and to her unbounded amazement Constance found herself in the presence of Basil St. Quentin.

Daphne's eyes twinkled with mischief. "Ah!" she said, "don't say that I can't keep a secret. Gerald invited Mr. St. Quentin yesterday, and we wanted to surprise you."

It was a surprise, and not altogether a pleasant one.

By-and-by the young man found his way to her side.

"When did you come to Paris?" he asked.

And she answered in a tone as indifferent as his own, but all the time she was asking herself miserably, "What have I done that he should so change towards me?"

"Are you making a long stay?"

“About a fortnight, I imagine.”

And then he asked if the journey had been rough and unpleasant, and other questions of a like nature, altogether trivial and unimportant, until poor Constance felt relieved to see Madame de Maupas open the piano and sweep her jewelled hands over the keys, for they must perforce keep silence.

Madame de Maupas was what is commonly known as “a fine woman.” She was a woman with a presence—tall, dark, and large-boned. Everything about her was big—great widely-open eyes, big smiling mouth, and her voice was of extraordinary compass and volume.

How she thumped the keys, how her hands flew up and down from bass to treble, from treble to bass, with what energy she pressed down the pedal, and what clinking and jingling her many bracelets made the while! It was appalling.

She sang a French song, which was pretty enough in its way, and when she had pounded out the last note, she rose from her seat with the air of one who had done her duty, and done it nobly too.

Raoul took her place, and Constance was bound to confess that, whatever his shortcomings might be, he was an admirable

musician. He had a rich tenor voice, and he understood the art of singing. Unlike his sister-in-law, he selected an English ballad, and sang it remarkably well. It was a plaintive little ditty, and it told of two lovers whose hard fate it was to part.

“ Ah, love ! never more, never more ”

ran the refrain. Daphne sat very still, her hands loosely folded before her and her lips parted, and her eyes never left the face of the singer. But when she rose, she gave herself a petulant shake.

“ Too sad,” she cried. “ Who will give us something gay ? We shall all have the blues.”

And after that there was more singing, one or two showy pieces rattled off by Madame de Maupas’ energetic fingers, and a dreamy waltz exquisitely played by Raoul.

Yes, Constance told herself, there was no doubt about it. Monsieur Raoul de Maupas was a very dangerous acquaintance for a girl of Daphne’s temperament. He was just the type of man to appeal to her.

Beyond those few conventional phrases, Basil St. Quentin hardly addressed Constance. He chatted to his hostess, after which he devoted himself to Angèle

Rivière, who accepted his attentions graciously.

She was the exact opposite of her half-sister, being short and thin, with the wasp-like waist and narrow shoulders of the true Frenchwoman. Her face was long and narrow, and her brow and chin receded. She had not the smallest pretensions to beauty, and yet her face was a pleasant one, relieved by a very winning smile. Long before that evening came to an end, Mrs. Armitage had gauged the depths of the shallow mind, and ferreted out poor Angèle's secret. She was madly in love with Raoul.

"And he appears to be unconscious of her very existence. What an unsatisfactory world this is, to be sure, with its round holes and square pegs," thought Constance, who perhaps had a fellow-feeling just then for Miss Rivière. With a cool shake of the hand, and not the slightest intimation of another visit, Mr. St. Quentin got himself away betimes, long before Madame de Maupas' party thought of taking their leave, and Daphne looked after him wonderingly.

"I should like to know if it is true what we have heard," she said somewhat eagerly to Constance—"about Mr. St. Quentin I mean. They say he has been jilted. He



does look down in the mouth, I must say—don't you think so?"

"He is very much the same as usual, I fancy." Even Constance had to resort to "a wee white lie" on occasion.

What a world this would be if everyone aired their true sentiments for the benefit of their fellow-creatures!

In many cases truth is well hidden "at the bottom of a well." Constance felt sick at heart, she could hardly have told why. But she was disappointed, and disgusted, and hurt, and incensed. There was a curious commingling of sensations within her. She tried to persuade herself that what Mr. St. Quentin might say or do was of no moment to her, that she absolutely did not care. She reasoned with herself, and scolded herself for her folly, and argued, and then at last broke down and wept such tears as for many long months she had been a stranger to.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

"I CAN quite understand your feeling of uneasiness as to Daphne's intimacy with the de Maupas family," said Constance to her brother-in-law, "but I do not see how it is to be avoided, unless you leave Paris for a time. That would make a break."

"Daphne declares she will not go. I have already suggested it."

"My dear Gerald, if you make up your mind, she will be obliged to go."

"And what sort of a life do you suppose I should lead?" said Mr. Armitage, half comically, and half in real earnest. "I don't think you have the slightest idea what Daphne can be when she is crossed or thwarted. I suppose you would not take her back to London with you?" he asked with considerable hesitation.

"Frankly, no, I would rather not."

Mr. Armitage sighed. "What do you advise, Constance?"

"I think that if you could take a trip to Monte Carlo, or to Cannes, or to some cheerful place where she would enjoy herself, she would soon forget her acquaintances here ;

but I do not counsel you to bury her in a little country place. In my opinion it would be rank folly Interest her, and amuse her, and give her so much to occupy her thoughts that she has no leisure to look back. That is my advice."

"I will act upon it. I have been very, very anxious, Constance. There has been a lack of candour and straightforwardness throughout the whole affair, that I can only account for in one way Daphne did not wish me to know how pleasant the intimacy had become."

"I do not think much harm has been done," said Constance, with an attempt at consolation. "I am quite certain that at heart she loves you dearly "

He shook his head. He was by no means so well assured.

When Christmas and the "*Jour de l'an*" were over, Constance fixed an early day for her return. Not even to herself dared she confess how cruelly hurt she was feeling at Basil St. Quentin's studied coldness and neglect. He had not even had the grace to answer an invitation which Daphne sent him for the last night of the old year, nor had he sent a single greeting for happiness in the new. She could no longer persuade herself that it was accidental. For some reason he wished and intended to avoid her.

Calling at Madame de Maupas' with Daphne, she heard that he had been to the Rue St. Honoré on the preceding day. He had leisure then to pay visits to strangers! Constance felt wounded to the quick. She longed to go back to London, and as Daphne had taken kindly to the Monte Carlo project, there was nothing to keep her longer in Paris. A letter from Rebecca put the finishing stroke to her discomfiture.

Miss Baillie had disappeared. There was no reason whatever for this, so far as Mrs. Strangways knew. She simply walked out of the house, having packed her box the night before, and taking only a small hand-bag with her.

"Oh dear," sighed Constance; "she is so terribly thin-skinned, that all unwittingly Rebecca may have given her offence. I must go back at once—I wish I had never left home!"

And it really did seem as if her journey had been productive of but small results, although Gerald Armitage warmly pressed her hand at parting, and declared that she was his good angel, and that Daphne was far more amenable to reason for her influence.

The tears were in Constance's eyes as she rested her head wearily against the cushions and thankful that her journey had begun.

Now to return to London and Clarges Street. Full of glad anticipations, Emily made her preparations, and arrived with Eva early on the day appointed.

Mrs. Strangways was not at home, and there was only Dyne to do the honours.

Eva flung her arms rapturously round the old woman's neck.

"Now you'll have to tell me a fairy tale every single night, and two on Christmas Eve," said she. And Dyne promised that she would.

"Lord Hardstock is going to show me how to cook an egg in his hat, and draw yards of ribbon out of a lighted candle. Won't it be beautiful?"

"Yes, miss." Dyne screwed up her face and took a quick glance at Miss Baillie out of the corner of her eye.

"Is his lordship expected, Dyne?"

It would have been more prudent to have kept silent, but it was beyond Emily. With all her heart she was longing to have all her glad anticipations confirmed.

"I believe so, miss."

Then it was true, really true. The colour flew to her face, and she turned aside, but not so quickly but that Dyne saw it.

"Surely she's never setting her cap in that quarter," the old woman said to herself. "But there, she's got brass

enough in that face of hers to make a kettle, and cheek enough to fill it. The saints preserve us. Who does she think she is, I wonder?"

But Emily's joy was short-lived. The day before Christmas Eve Mr. Strangways turned back, as he was leaving the room, to say carelessly to his wife:

"By-the-by, Rebecca, I quite forgot to give you a note from Lord Hardstock. He is prevented from coming to us to-morrow."

"Ah! precisely what I expected." Mrs. Strangways' tone was significant. "What did I tell you, my dear? I knew he would not come."

Eva at this moment created a diversion by melting into tears.

"He promised to show me—" she began, piteously, but her uncle patted her head kindly, and told her he was much more wonderful than his lordship, and would entertain her himself, and nobody paid any attention to Emily, for which she was thankful, feeling as she did that she had grown ghastly white. The disappointment was so great. Somehow she had counted on this visit of Rupert's. It was almost more than she could bear

Later on, as she sat in her own room, she told herself miserably that her lover must have known that she was in Clarges

Street, and that it was a positive insult to act as he was doing. She would have liked to rush off in search of him, and if she had been at home, it is more than probable she would have done so, but as a guest at Mrs. Strangways' house it was not possible. Christmas Day came and went, and anything more dreary poor Emily never experienced. Eva had eaten too many good things and was fractious and troublesome.

Emily's piteous little letter to Lord Hardstock remained unanswered. He had not even considered it necessary to send her a card of greeting, although Mrs. Strangways and Eva had both received one. Emily was growing desperate.

Three or four days passed by, and at length she hinted she was desirous of paying a visit to friends at a distance, and if not inconvenient would like to leave Clarges Street about four o'clock on the following afternoon.

"And you must forgive me if I am a little late," she murmured with a winning smile. "It is such a terrible distance to Richmond, and my friends have no spare room, or I would remain all night." Of course Mrs. Strangways said it was of no consequence, and Emily departed the next afternoon.

"I expect Miss Baillie had too much mince pie," remarked Eva, reflectively, as she watched her governess walk briskly down the street.

"Why?" asked Mr. Strangways, with whom the child was somewhat of a favourite, possibly because he saw extremely little of her.

"Because she's rather cross, like I was, you know "

"Miss Baillie wouldn't be cross if you were a good girl, Eva," said Rebecca.

Eva played a bar or two on the window sill with her restless fingers, shrugged her plump little shoulders, and laughed.

"Auntie Becky," she confided solemnly, after a pause, "something goes wrong inside ; it isn't a bit me."

Whereupon Mr. Strangways broke into a fit of noisy mirth, and his wife thanked Providence that she had not been blessed with a family.

Now, although Emily left Clarges Street at an orthodox hour, she knew far too much about Lord Hardstock's habits to expect to find him at his chambers until very much later, so she frittered the time away in sundry small shoppings, taking an omnibus up to Westbourne Grove, that refuge of the destitute, and making her purchases in a leisurely way that was



positively exasperating, after which she ordered a sandwich and a glass of sherry, and frittered away another twenty minutes.

It was close upon eight o'clock when at length she found herself on the familiar staircase, and her heart thumped and hammered against her side, as she ran lightly up. She knocked again and again, but there was no reply. As once before, so now, she stooped down to raise the mat, but no key was there.

"I will wait. I am not going back until I have seen him," she said resolutely. Half an hour passed slowly away. Still no sound, and not a soul coming up or down.

Then Emily pulled a letter out of her pocket, tore off half a sheet and scribbled a word or two on it.

"I shall be back in an hour. I must see you."

This she dropped into the letter-box, and went wearily downstairs.

"I must have some dinner, and if he comes in again before I return, he will find what I have written and wait for me," she reflected, and hailed a hansom and had herself driven to a quiet little restaurant she knew of, where, despite her uneasiness, she managed to make a very substantial meal,

order a pint of champagne, and drink every drop of it.

Then she returned to the Albany. The door was still shut, and everything looked precisely as when she left, only that the mat was a trifle askew, and the impromptu note she had put in the box had been removed. This she was sure of, for, fearing lest it might be overlooked, she had taken the precaution to turn over a tiny corner of the paper, so that it projected a little bit. Not a trace was now to be seen. With renewed hope she knocked loudly, pressing her finger to the electric bell at the same time. All was as silent as the grave and as unresponsive.

It could not be possible that he had been and gone, disregarding her communication! Emily paced up and down the narrow passage in a white heat of rage. If it were so, she would never forgive him—never!

Even a worm will turn, and Emily felt that her patience had reached its utmost limits. Then, as she passed, her eyes riveted on the door, from within came the unmistakable sound of a yawn—partially smothered.

He was there! And he did not intend to see her. It was some little time before the full knowledge of this dawned upon her. Her hand was raised to the knocker

to emphasise the fact that she was waiting there, and knew that her lover was lying low, then it dropped at her side, and with a face grown cold and haggard, she went slowly down the staircase and out into the street.

Miss Baillie was back in Clarges Street by half-past ten and retired at once to her room, being seen by no one, and by early daybreak she was gone. Her bed had been unslept in, her box was packed and strapped, and the only articles missing were a handbag and a long cloak which had hung behind the door.

“And now, my dear, you know as much as I do,” said Mrs. Strangways to her sister. “I must say the whole thing is extraordinary, but we shall probably have a solution of the problem before long. You had better make up your mind to remain here for a day or two.”

And Constance was glad to do so. Her brain was in a whirl. What in the world could have induced Miss Baillie to act so strangely? She could only fall back on her old surmises. Rebecca must have given her offence in some way, and she was determined not to remain beneath her roof. But why had she not communicated with herself? This she could and should have done. Eva had been left in her charge,

and Mrs. Armitage could not but feel that she had grossly neglected her duties.

She passed a restless night. Her head ached, and she could still feel the motion of the steamer, that eternal thud, thud, as it ploughed through the waters. She came down to breakfast looking pale and ill, and Rebecca persuaded her to go into the drawing-room and lie down for an hour or two. She had hardly been there ten minutes, when the door bell rang, and, to her great annoyance, Lord Hardstock was ushered in.

"I am resting," said Constance simply, as she held out her hand.

"Oh! done up with your journey?" replied his lordship, pleasantly. "I did not know you were expected home until the beginning of next week."

"No; I had intended coming back on Tuesday, but this flight of Miss Baillie's necessitated an immediate return."

"What do you mean?" Evidently this was the first intimation Lord Hardstock had had of Emily's disappearance.

Briefly Mrs. Armitage recapitulated events. "We cannot imagine why she went, or where she has gone," said she. "I tried to make her so happy, and the whole thing troubles me more than I can say."

Lord Hardstock contemplated the elabo-

rate pattern of fern leaves on a fawn-coloured ground, with which Mrs. Strangeways' drawing-room was carpeted, for several minutes before he spoke. Then he cleared his throat, screwed up his courage, and took a desperate plunge.

"It is vexatious in the extreme. You might at least have looked for common civility, if it was asking too much of human nature to expect gratitude. Constance—you ought to have someone to fight your battles for you, to protect your interests, to take a portion of the load off your shoulders—will you give me the right to love and care for you?"

It had come at last, as she had always known it must come some day. Thoroughly unnerved and really suffering, she was perilously on the verge of tears. But she tried to smile and make her rejection of his offer as gracious as she could, to wrap the pill well up in silver paper and present it as much in the form of a bonbon as possible.

She told him she fully appreciated the compliment he paid her, and was grateful to him for his interest in her, but that what he urged was out of the question.

"I shall never marry again," she added. And she really meant what she said. She did at that moment believe that there would

be greater happiness for her in a single life than in any other.

Lord Hardstock fixed his eyes upon her scrutinisingly.

“Will you answer me one question—is there anyone else?”

And with perfect truth Constance answered: “There is no one else.”

“No one you prefer to myself?” he persisted.

“That is not a fair question. No one whom I am likely to marry”

And with that he had to be content. But the question did not end there. Since he had no rival to fear, what was there to prevent him gaining his ends? And so he pleaded and argued, until Constance rose with an angry flush on her face.

“Please understand that my decision is irrevocable,” she said; “under no circumstances could I reconsider it. I have no wish to alter my condition, and prefer to remain single.”

He pushed his chair aside and faced her, a curious expression about his mouth which it puzzled Constance to decipher.

“I will never give up hope,” he said between his teeth, with dogged persistence. “I believe in fate and I am assured that one day we shall come together.”

“Never,” said Constance’s heart. Aloud she said gently :

“At all events, in the meantime, I may be allowed to have a mind of my own?”

He bowed. A minute later the door shut upon him, and Constance sank back on her sofa with a half-laugh that was something like a sob.

“I am weak and foolish to-day,” she said, as she dried her eyes.

But she was something more than that, though she would not acknowledge it to herself. She was proving herself a true woman, and no wiser than the rest of her sex, and grieving over the defection of a man.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

LORD HARDSTOCK had plenty of food for reflection, and to judge by his countenance, his musings were not of the happiest. Constance's rejection of his offer neither surprised nor disappointed him. He had expected nothing else. He knew she did not love him, but he believed in the potency of the dropping water, and was willing to bide his time until the stone showed signs of softening. He was not in the least disheartened at the failure of the first attempt, and had both pluck and determination to try again and again, but he was seriously discomposed at the news respecting Emily. Not a word had he received from her since the night she had been to his rooms. Where then was she, and what was she doing? That he was at the bottom of it all, of course he was well convinced. Whatever poor Emily's thoughts were, she was undeniably in love with him. The girl could not have been so foolish as to destroy herself? No, he put the notion out of his mind at once. She was too fond of the good things of this world, of life and its pleasures; too



solicitous for her own comfort to do herself an injury

"I suppose I shall hear from her in time," he thought. There was nothing to be done but wait, for he had not the remotest idea where to turn to look for her. She had no friends except himself. Of course there was that doctor fellow—Dale. Was it possible that she was with him? He admired her—had actually proposed to her, or she said he had.

Lord Hardstock drew a long breath. That would prove the happiest solution of the mystery, but somehow his lordship felt rather doubtful. He got a directory and copied out the address in case he might require it. And when three or four days passed by, and still there was no news of the stray lamb, he went over to Kensington and boldly walked up to the surgery door and rang the bell. As it chanced, Dr. Dale opened it himself, being in the act of going out. Seeing a gentleman standing there, he at once asked him to come in.

The two men stood facing each other.

"He doesn't look like a patient; what does he want?" was in the mind of one, while the other was telling himself that women were kittle cattle. Here was a splendid looking fellow, whom any girl might be proud to love, and yet Emily

had turned up her pretty little nose at him.

"I must apologise for taking up your time. I presume you are Dr Dale," began Lord Hardstock, "and I believe you were in attendance some time ago at Mrs. Armitage's, and made the acquaintance of a young lady there—Miss Baillie?"

"Miss Baillie was my patient." Dr. Dale spoke haughtily.

"Precisely so—may I ask if you have seen or heard of her during the last fortnight?"

"No, I have not. I understood that she had accompanied Mrs. Armitage's little daughter on a visit to her aunt, and I believe has not yet returned."

He was speaking the truth; Lord Hardstock could see that. Evidently he did not know where Emily was.

"I trust nothing is wrong?"

"No—I hope not. The young lady left Clarges Street somewhat precipitately, and both Mrs. Strangways and Mrs. Armitage are much distressed about it."

"I am addressing ——?" Dr. Dale was not a man to beat about the bush. He intended to know who his visitor was, and what he had to do with Miss Baillie.

"My name is Hardstock. You may have heard of me. I have known Miss

Baillie many years, and was instrumental in placing her with Mrs. Armitage. This rash step on her part makes it extremely awkward for me. You are not able to help me then?"

Dr. Dale paused. "I did not say that. I do not know where the young lady is, but I might find out."

"How the deuce can you do that?" wondered his lordship, but a straw is not to be despised when everything else fails, so he bowed and looked grateful and pleased.

Dr. Dale passed his hand over his brow, and remained silent for some minutes; then he motioned to a table on which were ink and papers.

"Kindly leave me your address. I will communicate with you if I have any information that may be of service."

A minute later Lord Hardstock took his departure.

"I have done it before—the question is, can I do it again?"

Vivian Dale stood with both hands resting on the back of the chair his visitor had just vacated. He was in a hurry, that is to say he had received a summons ten minutes before to a case that was likely to prove a lengthy one, so he turned over a heap of books that lay on a side table, and

selecting one that served his purpose, slipped it into his pocket, picked up his hat and went out, locking the door behind him.

In a stuffy little room at the top of a lodging-house in Arundel Street, for which nevertheless she was asked an extortionate sum, by reason of its close vicinity to Piccadilly, Emily Baillie had taken up her residence. But it is very certain that if Lord Hardstock, or Mrs. Armitage, or even keen-sighted little Eva, had passed her in the street they would not have recognised her. An adept in the art of making up, she had transformed herself into a portly, middle-aged woman, with a fringe of black curly hair, sundry lines about the corners of her eyes and mouth destroying all resemblance to her own physiognomy, with its fresh skin and soft curves. In a waterproof and a close fitting black bonnet, no one would have noticed her, or if they had, would have supposed her to be a little tradesman's wife, and never given her a second glance. This was precisely what Emily wished and intended. Her suspicions were now fully roused. She believed that she was superseded in Lord Hardstock's affections and resolved to find out by whom.

For this purpose she dogged his footsteps, and watched him from early morn until late at night. It was an easy matter

to do this, for he had not the faintest suspicion that he was being shadowed; and, as he had no troublesome duns to evade, he hardly took the trouble to look about him. But at the end of the fourth day Emily was bound to acknowledge herself baffled. His lordship led a quiet, humdrum life, spending hours at his club, and strolling home usually about midnight. She could not find that he had any especial lady friends, certainly none that might prove fatal to her own peace of mind. It was strange. Emily began to think that she had acted rashly, and that it would be by no means easy to retrieve the step she had taken. She wished she had been more patient.

It would have been wiser, she reflected, to have seen her lover and heard what he had to say for himself. After all he might have had excellent reasons for acting as he had done. As it was, she had cut herself off from all communications with her old friends, and she was fairly puzzled how to comport herself. Then she thought she would go up to Kensington, and discover if Mrs. Armitage had returned home. This she did, and soon made up her mind that Mrs. Armitage had come back, for there were now pale rose curtains up in the windows. Heartily wishing herself back in

her old home and bitterly regretting her folly, she walked down the opposite side of the street, feeling lonely and miserable enough. With her own hand she had severed the link that held her to the world in which her lover dwelt. She had only herself to thank for it. As she thought thus, a man coming in the opposite direction looked quickly into her face, passed, hesitated, scrutinised her more closely, turned and would have accosted her, but that she quickened her footsteps.

It was Dr. Dale. He was puzzled. What on earth was there about this woman, evidently of the lower classes, to remind him of Emily Baillie? It was absurd. And with a smile at his own folly he continued his way.

But Emily did not breathe freely until she was half a mile away.

Then she got into an omnibus and went back to her room.

"The game is up," she told herself. "And now I must manage to wriggle out of the scrape I have got myself into, as best I can."

She tore off her wig, removed sundry paddings and wires which had contributed to her bulky appearance, and put on the same dress in which she had left Clarges

Street. Indeed it was the only dress she had. She had given orders to Carter, Paterson to fetch her trunk and leave it in the cloak room at Charing Cross, and there it was still.

It took her a long time to remove the paint from her face, but it was done at last. About eight o'clock she sallied forth, well wrapped in her cloak, and with a light veil over her bonnet, and within three-quarters of an hour she was standing outside Dr. Dale's door. Now it must be confessed that the doctor was very dissatisfied with the results of his second experiment in the hypnotic line. He had concentrated his thoughts upon Miss Baillie to the entire exclusion of everything else, making his mind a blank, as the book he was studying bade him do, but so far nothing else had come of it.

And on this especial evening he was idly smoking a cigar, having banished all thought of her from his mind, when lo! the door opened and he beheld her before him. There was something radically wrong about it. This was his first thought; his second, unfeigned delight at seeing the girl.

"Sit down," he said, "and tell me why you ran away from Mrs. Strangways."

Emily stared, as well she might.

“Did not Mrs. Armitage tell you that I was nursing a sick friend?” she asked, sweetly

“I have not seen Mrs. Armitage,” replied he.

“How then did you know I was away?”

And he told her of Lord Hardstock’s visit. Emily’s heart beat tumultuously. He was anxious about her—troubled! It was a good sign.

She laughed merrily. “It is too funny,” said she, “that he should have come to you. Mrs. Armitage could have explained everything to him. I wrote to her as soon as I knew I should be detained, and told her the reason why I shall go back in a day or two, but I am really worn out. I have had no rest for several nights.”

Dr. Dale began to think it a very small mole-hill out of which this especial mountain had been made, and never for a moment doubted the truth of what Emily said. Not a word did he say of his hypnotic experiment. He felt rather ashamed of himself, and was extremely glad that he had failed. Evidently Miss Baillie’s visit here to-night was entirely apart from any influence he might have over her.

“It was good of you to come and see me,” he said.



She smiled. "I have not many friends, and so I value those I have."

"Oh, Emily, if only I might be something nearer and dearer."

She shook her head, but she slid her hand into his and let it lie there.

"Make unto yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness," was counsel which Emily never disregarded. She was wise in her generation, and knew that "great things from little things arise," and that it was folly to despise small beginnings.

Dr. Dale might be forgiven for leaning towards the belief that Emily might yet be induced to lend a ready ear to his wooing.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

“IF you please, ma’am, Miss Baillie is in the drawing-room.”

So astonished was Constance when this announcement was made a day or two later, that she overturned her basket, and to Eva’s delight left her employed in picking up and restoring everything to its proper place, while she went downstairs.

She did not hold out her hand. She simply stood still and looked coldly on Emily. That young lady was not in the very least daunted by the coldness of her reception.

“I am so sorry I could not come back before,” she murmured, apologetically, “but I needed rest myself after so much nursing. I—I fear you are feeling vexed with me, as you never answered my letter.”

“Your letter! I have never received one line from you since you left my sister’s house in the ungracious manner you did.”

Emily gasped. “Oh!” she said, and sat down hurriedly. “What must you have thought of me all this time?”

"I hardly think you would care to hear." Constance was still unappeased. Somehow she did not believe in this plausible explanation of a missing letter.

"I can quite understand that it must have seemed strange," said Emily, "but, dear Mrs. Armitage, you surely will not hold me accountable for what has been purely accidental. It has worried me immensely to be obliged to go as I did at a moment's notice, but it was unavoidable. It is the first time I have paid a visit or asked for so much as a day's holiday since I have been with you, and I certainly did not anticipate that you would bear any ill-feeling about it."

"Have you any objection to telling me where you have been to, and with whom?" asked Constance. She was slow to take offence, and was the least suspicious of women, but some instinctive sense warned her to be wary.

Emily coloured. "I went to nurse a friend whom I found seriously ill at Richmond. If you do not believe what I am telling you, please be frank enough to say so, in which case I will at once pack my boxes and relieve you of my presence."

Mrs. Armitage took not the slightest notice of her evident annoyance. She was thinking deeply.

"Lord Hardstock told us that you had neither friends nor relatives," she said, slowly.

Emily rose without another word and walked deliberately out of the room. She had gone upstairs to her own apartment to collect her possessions.

"What ought I to do?" said Constance to herself, terribly discomposed. "I am certain she is not telling the truth, and yet perhaps I have no right to question her thus closely. She conducts herself with perfect propriety under my roof. I don't know how to act. I am used to her and she is useful. Then, too, Eva likes her. I wish I did, but I'm afraid I don't. Still, my personal likes and dislikes should not sway me much either way."

As she sat there, uncertain and irresolute, there came the patter of small footsteps on the stairs, and a childish treble outside the door. "Let me in, mamma."

It was Eva. Her eyes were big and round, and her baby face sorely distressed.

"She is going away, right away for always!" she burst forth, as she clambered into her mother's lap. "Oh, please make her stay. I will be good."

This settled the knotty point. Holding the child's hand Mrs. Armitage went up to

Miss Baillie's room. The floor was strewn with articles of clothing, and before a big trunk knelt Emily. The moment she saw Eva and her mother she put her hands over her face and sobbed loudly. Constance's heart smote her. How was she to know that the bright eyes were dry and tearless?

She only saw that the girl was troubled, and with a few gracious words strove to put things straight again.

"But you do not trust me?" wailed the governess.

For a second Mrs. Armitage hesitated.

"If I did not believe in you and have entire confidence in your integrity, I should not ask you as I do now to stay with us."

"Yes. Oh! do stay," pleaded Eva.

And Emily caught the child in her arms and kissed her more affectionately than she had ever done before. Through her she had accomplished her purpose, and she was not ungrateful.

That evening Constance spent at Clarges Street, and, of course, Rebecca was duly informed of the lost sheep's return to the fold.

The sisters were alone, Mr. Strangways being at a bachelor entertainment.

"I don't see what else I could have done," said Constance.

“No ; not if you believe her tale,” said Rebecca, her lip curling scornfully the while. “You are very easily taken in, my dear. I am not, and perhaps if you knew as much as I do, you would regret your leniency”

“What do you mean ?”

“Well, I did not intend mentioning it if, as I supposed, we had seen the last of Miss Baillie, but since she has chosen to return, I think I should be doing wrong in keeping it back from you. Miss Baillie evidently had a lover, and was in the habit of meeting him constantly”

Constance smiled. “What a heinous offence ! I suppose you are alluding to Dr. Dale ?”

“I don’t know who the man was, or is, nor do I care two pins ; but I know this, that the night she was locked out and told you a trumped up story about having a headache and going out for a breath of fresh air, she had been to see him.”

“How on earth do you know anything about it ?”

And then Rebecca told how Dyne had found the scrap of paper which made the appointment, and which undoubtedly the governess had kept, and produced from her purse the very identical slip and laid it before her sister.

"If this is so, she is not a proper person to have the training of my child," said Constance, gravely. Truthful herself, she abominated anything like deceit in those about her. And then she glanced down at the little folded paper, and she pressed her lips tightly together. It was but a word or two, but she knew the writing well.

"If I close my doors on Emily Baillie, I shall also strike from my list of—acquaintances" (she could not even say friends) "the name of Lord Hardstock," she said, in a tone as cold as ice.

Her sister looked at her in astonishment.

"If she has deceived us, so has he. There is not the shadow of a doubt that that writing is his, and that if the foolish girl went to meet a man that night, that man was Lord Hardstock."

"Well, upon my word, I think you must have taken leave of your senses, Constance. What could Lord Hardstock want with her?"

Constance shrugged her shoulders in a way intended to convey that that was a question beyond her capability to answer.

"I do not see any similarity myself about the writing," she continued, wishing, now that it was too late, that she had kept her own counsel respecting Miss Baillie's shortcomings. "How a sensible woman like

yourself, Constance, can be so misled and prejudiced as you are against that unfortunate man I cannot comprehend. I know perfectly well, although you have not chosen to open your lips on the subject to me, that he proposed to you before you left here, and that you refused him, and how you can reconcile it to your conscience to wreck the life of a man as devoted to you as he is, and to blast the future and prospects of the children you profess to care so much for, I can't conceive."

"My children! Surely in so serious a matter as marriage I may be allowed to consider my own feelings."

Constance had grown very white, and a hard look came round the corners of her mouth.

"You seem entirely to ignore or put aside your lack of means. The children are young, it is true ; but when Arthur comes to man's estate, what will he think of his mother's selfishness in robbing him a second time of his birthright! How cruel you can be !"

"Have you any idea what it is you are urging on me? I am to sacrifice myself, the whole of the life that lies before me, for the sake of wealth and competency in the years to come for my children! I would gladly lie down and die if that could



bring them happiness and prosperity. God knows I love them better than myself, but this thing is beyond me."

Rebecca was moved to pity. She had not meant to wound her sister. In her inmost heart she believed that a marriage with Lord Hardstock would be the best thing for Constance's peace and comfort; but as Constance herself felt so strongly about it, there was nothing more to be said.

"Of course, I can only judge of the expediency of such a step," she said. "I am speaking as an outsider, and one who, being wholly unprejudiced, sees both sides of the question. It is better that we should not discuss it."

"Yes," said Constance, miserably; "do not let us talk of it again. Not even for the sake of my darlings could I consent to marry Lord Hardstock. I would rather live in an attic in London than at Greystone—with him."

And after that, greatly though Rebecca marvelled at, and deplored, the state of affairs, she would have been less than woman had she pressed the matter further. But the question as to what to do with Miss Baillie was not so easily disposed of.

She had assumed a quiet pensive air which it would have been positively brutal

to attack. She really was so inoffensive and diffident that Mrs. Armitage determined to allow the matter to drop. After all, she might be in error. It did seem improbable that Lord Hardstock should meet her clandestinely when, had his inclination prompted him to do so, he could have framed her life so differently for her. The more she thought of it, the less likely it seemed.

He had never exhibited any particular feeling for her. Looking back, Mrs. Armitage failed to recall a single occasion on which he had shown the faintest inclination for her presence. No, she was wrong. A similarity in the style of writing had led her astray.

She blushed for her own suspicions, and was more gentle in her manner towards Emily. I have omitted to say that in consequence of measles having broken out in the school where Arthur was, he had not been home at Christmas time, but early in February he came for a fortnight's holiday, noisy and boisterous, and full of fun and life.

Constance was glad to have him with her, although perhaps Eva was nearer to her mother's heart. A girl has so many more opportunities of

creeping into that holy of holies than a boy.

“My son is my son till he gets him a wife,  
But my daughter’s my daughter all her life.”

Boys must go out into the busy world, away from the maternal shelter ; it is but fitting and natural that they should. They will contract fresh ties and have pleasures and interests apart from their mother, but whatever joy comes into a girl’s life, its sunshine and its shadows, its cares and delights, must to a great extent be halved and shared.

In her daughter’s life and love a mother lives again. She is one with her, rejoices for her, sympathises with her, and would, if it were possible, suffer for her.

Arthur would be all the better for a blow of fresh sea air, Dr. Dale declared, so, to his exceeding delight, he was sent to Brighton for a week. Constance intended to have gone with him and devoted herself to the lad, giving him as much pleasure as her slender purse could afford, but a day or two before she slipped while coming downstairs, and managed to sprain her ankle, which put a stop to all thought of leaving home. Miss Baillie would go in her place, and Eva and she must console one another.

"It won't be so jolly, mother," grumbled the lad, as he rested his curly head against her shoulder.

"I thought you were so fond of Miss Baillie, dear; you were her most devoted slave last holidays."

Arthur was silent. He could hardly account to himself for his altered views. Her beauty pleased him still. She was good to look at, and Arthur was his father's son in that respect, and dearly loved a pretty face, but she was not to be depended on. Sometimes she was charming and would let him do as he liked, without a dissenting word; at others she would repulse him roughly. He was never sure of her moods and humours.

Still, Brighton with Miss Baillie would be pleasant enough. All the same he wished his mother could have gone. Eva was very sad. Emily had become sincerely attached to her. There was something very winning about the child, and she had a habit of taking it for granted that everyone loved her, which was difficult to overcome. The touch of the tender little arms had its effect even upon Miss Baillie's world-worn, passion-tossed heart.

Eva loved her for herself, really cared for her, and cried at the prospect of a separation. It was a pleasurable feeling.

Emily Baillie felt at times so lonely, and so desolate, that the affection of a dog would have been grateful to her. In all the wide world she stood alone !

And that I think is the saddest feeling a human creature can have.

## CHAPTER XXX.

THE very day Miss Baillie and Arthur started for Brighton, Lord Hardstock called on Mrs. Armitage.

He had still no news of Emily, and having seen nothing of the Strangways, had not the most remote idea that she had returned to Kensington. And when Constance informed him of all that had occurred, he was to a certain extent relieved, although he scented mischief in the girl having left town without either seeing or communicating with him. Still, she was under Mrs. Armitage's roof again, and that was one point gained.

"You have not seen her, or heard from her, I suppose?" said Constance, a little significantly, he could not but think.

"I?" Lord Hardstock spoke in a tone of the greatest surprise. "My dear Mrs. Armitage, I never had a line from Miss Baillie in my life, so far as I remember."

Constance could never account for the impulse that made her draw out the slip of paper which Dyne had purloined, and place

it before him. "Then you did not send her that?" she asked.

A dull red burned on Rupert Hardstock's face as he scanned it. What fools women were! How rash! How superlatively careless! To think that Emily Baillie, of all women, should not have been more prudent. It was incredible! With the utmost *sang-froid* he turned to Constance.

"I suppose it is a joke," he said, feebly, "but I confess I do not see the point."

"Did you, or did you not, write those words? I think you will allow that I have the right to ask, as you yourself placed Miss Baillie here?"

"Unquestionably! No, Constance, on my word of honour as a gentleman—no! I hoped you did me more justice than to believe such a thing possible."

She was silent. "The writing is similar to your own," she said at last, half apologetically.

"Is it? I flattered myself I wrote a tolerably good hand." He shrugged his shoulders. "However, I don't care two pins about that; but what I do care about is that you should think me capable of such ungentlemanlike and dishonourable conduct. I feel I have not deserved it. And permit me to say that I find it curious

that you should have treasured what after all is another's property "

How was it that this man always managed to put her in the wrong, to pose as an injured individual, and extract apologies from her? pondered Constance vexedly

"I do not think what I said implied anything of the sort; it was not my intention to reflect upon you in any way. But it having come to my knowledge that Miss Baillie was in the habit of meeting someone in a clandestine and underhanded manner, I——"

Constance came to a full-stop, conscious that she had floundered out of her depth. With the air of a martyr Lord Hardstock rose and held out his hand.

"You are not going?"

Against her will she said the words. She did not want him to stay His presence annoyed and irritated her, and yet he was so evidently driven away by her own conduct that in common decency she had no choice. It was forced upon her.

"I will say good afternoon."

"You are going because—because——"

"Yes, because while you feel towards me and think of me as you do now, it is impossible for me to do otherwise."

She bit her lip.



“Try and be just; I ask nothing more than that. Justice! It is what the commonest criminal is accorded. Have I ever acted in such a manner as would warrant you in supposing I could play that dastardly part you have tacitly accused me of?”

“I accused you of nothing.”

“Pardon me, but you did. You asked me if I was in the habit of making clandestine appointments with your governess.”

“She certainly went to meet somebody”

“I do not for a moment dispute that fact, but I do emphatically object to be suspected of being that somebody.” Two minutes later the hall door shut upon him, and Constance stood where he had left her, uncertain whether to be vexed or relieved. For she knew that she had seriously offended Lord Hardstock.

“My dear Constance, what could induce you to mention that affair of Miss Baillie’s to Lord Hardstock?” cried her sister in a tone of the greatest consternation, a day or two later. “Since you had decided to keep the girl in your house, the least you could do was to ignore any share he might have in her indiscretion.”

“I don’t know what prompted me to bring up the unlucky subject,” returned

Constance, wearily. "I am very sorry that I did so."

"And so you ought to be. It is a poor return to make for the kindness and consideration Lord Hardstock has always shown to you. But I suppose that is a point we shall never agree upon."

"I have always acknowledged his goodness to me." Constance's tone was full of hurt pride.

"Yes, in a half-hearted way—grudgingly. Most women would give their ears to stand in your shoes."

"I wish they could. Why will men fall in love with the wrong people? It is very embarrassing."

"Now, Constance," continued her sister, "I have too great a regard for Lord Hardstock to see him insulted. He feels this conduct on your part deeply. What are you going to do? The first advance must come from you."

"Then it will never be made. Since Lord Hardstock has chosen to take umbrage at what I cannot but consider a very natural inquiry to come from myself, seeing that Miss Baillie forms one of my household, it is decidedly better that the matter should rest there."

"You don't mean to apologise?"

Constance looked into her sister's face and laughed.

"No," said she. "That I certainly have no intention of doing."

"Well," said Mrs. Strangways, seeing her castles in the air respecting Constance's future crumbling into ruins about her, "I think you are behaving in the most unladylike and unchristian manner, and I would never have believed it of you."

"Poor Rebecca, I have already been somewhat of a disappointment to you, haven't I?" And she refused to pursue the question further. The most that she would yield was, that if Lord Hardstock chose to ignore what had passed and call upon her again, she would resume her friendly relations with him.

"You did not even say that you believed what he told you," said Rebecca, angrily

"Lord Hardstock denied the charge against him, 'as a gentleman and on his word of honour,' so I hardly thought it was necessary. I had no choice but to accept his word."

But she did not say that he had convinced her, and Rebecca inclined to the belief that she was sceptical still.

And so it fell out that two days after Emily returned from Brighton, and Arthur

had gone back to school, as they sat busily engaged on some needlework for Eva—Miss Baillie and Mrs. Armitage together—the door opened, and Mrs. Strangways, accompanied by Lord Hardstock, walked in.

Constance felt very nervous, but she tried to act as if nothing had occurred. Mrs. Strangways was jubilant. She had contrived to tide over difficulties and bring these troublesome lovers into an amenable frame of mind, for as lovers she persisted in regarding them.

Presently she rose from her chair.

“I want to speak to you, Constance,” she said, and the sisters left the room together.

The moment they were alone, Lord Hardstock drew nearer to Miss Baillie.

“Emily,” he said, softly, “what does all this mean?”

The girl flung back her head defiantly, but answered never a word.

“Why are you treating me so unkindly? Do you know that I am very unhappy?”

She laughed a little scornful laugh.

There was a sound on the stairs of footsteps. His lordship hurriedly withdrew to his former seat.

“I have so much to say to you, my darling. Come and see me to-morrow evening.”

“It is quite impossible.”

Emily’s heart was thumping away at a furious rate, but ice was not colder than her voice.

“I want you, Emily. You can find it in you to refuse me?”

She shook her head.

“Hush—they are just outside.”

“I shall expect you, dearest.”

“I will not come.”

And that was the last word he had alone with her. And though he waited until ten o’clock on the following evening, Emily kept to her resolve.

The next afternoon Constance sat alone in her drawing-room. Eva was out with her governess. She had a book in hand, but she was not reading. She was thinking, and her thoughts were sad enough. The front door bell rang, but she paid no heed to it. She had but few visitors, and was expecting no one. So, when she heard someone ascending the stairs she looked round impatiently, wondering who the intruder might be.

“Mr. St. Quentin!”

So great was her surprise that Constance forgot to rise from her chair, and the young man was half across the floor before she struggled to her feet.

“How do you do?”

It is the Englishman's conventional salutation, and Basil St. Quentin repeated the formula mechanically, his eyes fixed on the sweet pensive face with something very like desperation in his own.

"You will wonder what has brought me here?" he began in a halting fashion.

"Not at all. I am glad to see you."

Constance had recovered her composure, and was anxious to set her visitor at his ease. She could not but see his perturbation, and a certain nervousness that was wholly foreign to him.

"You have not been in London for a long time."

"Yes; I was here in November."

"And you did not take the trouble to come and see me?" was Constance's outspoken thought. The reproach in her eyes was more than he could bear.

"For pity's sake, listen," he cried. "I have been misled. I heard—I was told that you were going to marry Lord Hardstock, and it almost broke my heart, Constance."

And after that there was a pause in which each could hear the quick breathing of the other.

"I only learned the truth yesterday, and I am here; I could not live another minute away from you. I felt I must see

you and ask if—oh, Constance, I have no words in which to tell you my love. Looking back on the long years it seems to me that I have loved you always, only I did not know it. You were always more to me than any other woman.”

He was standing before her, with outstretched hands, eager, anxious, waiting for his answer. Slowly she was waking to consciousness of her love for him, and to the knowledge that life without him would be incomplete. And yet she was afraid—she doubted.

“It is all so sudden,” she said at last.

“But you love me, Constance?”

“I am not sure.”

“Take your own time, dear heart! I can wait. Listen. I have despatches for Constantinople. I may be there a month. Will you give me your answer when I return?”

She smiled, but her eyes were full of tears.

“April 5th, I shall be back in London if all is well. Take till then to decide what our future is to be. I shall be at Morley’s Hotel on the evening of the fifth—let me find a letter from you waiting for me.”

“Yes,” she said slowly. “I will.”

“And now, am I to go?”

She was unnerved. It was only by the

greatest effort that she could hold herself in check. He saw it.

"Good-bye," he said. "I shall leave England to-morrow morning, but I carry a lighter heart with me. Some time I will tell you how miserable I have been."

He held her hand closely in his warm clasp, then dropped it and ran lightly down the stairs.

Almost it seemed a dream. Constance flung herself on the sofa and buried her head in the cushions.

How grey, how lonely her life had been an hour ago! Now it was flooded with sunshine. Her sweet, shamed secret stood revealed, and she gloried in it.

He loved her. Had loved her always. He wanted her to share his life, to live by his side, to be his wife!

It seemed too wonderful to be true. When at length she sat up and pushed the loose hair off her brow, she felt that the die was cast, and that the tangles would be smoothed out of her life, since it only remained with herself to utter the magical word which was to open the gates of Paradise to her.

Her thoughts ran riot. She grew joyous and gay, and young, as she allowed herself to yield to the pure womanly instinct within her, and to love even as she was loved.



## CHAPTER XXXI.

"MISS BAILLIE'S been here, ma'am, a-asking me for some pattern you was so good as to say you'd lend her."

"Oh, Dyne, I meant to leave it out for her. How very stupid of me."

"She was just off to the dressmaker's," returned Dyne, in a tone that implied disbelief.

Mrs. Strangways looked keenly at her. "Well, and why should she not?"

"Shall I take it to Miss Gordon's for her, ma'am?"

"No, I will send it on by post."

"What did she say about the love-letter I found?"

Dyne had been boiling over with curiosity for weeks, and thought it rather hard that she should not be made acquainted with what had happened, since she had been instrumental in unmasking the young lady.

"I believe my sister decided not to mention it to her at all."

"Dear me!" It would be difficult to tell how disappointed Dyne felt.

"You see there was nothing to prove that it even belonged to Miss Baillie after

all," continued her mistress, "and even if it did, there might be a good and sufficient reason to account for it."

"Yes, and peas might grow on bramble bushes, but I never came across none that did."

Dyne whisked herself out of the room in a very unamiable frame of mind. She cordially detested Miss Baillie, and would have dearly liked to see her punished.

To her mind the whole thing was so palpable that it allowed of no defence. And she was amazed and disgusted at Mrs. Armitage's reticence on the subject.

"May-be she's on the look-out, and means to catch my lady tripping," she thought, and found a crumb of comfort in the reflection.

But Dyne was right. Emily had made the dressmaker an excuse for securing a couple of hours to herself.

No less than three letters had she received from Lord Hardstock urging the necessity of an interview. The handwriting on the envelopes was disguised, and the letters themselves were "printed" in schoolboy fashion.

Emily hesitated and weighed the question. But the last was so imperative that she felt compelled to yield.

"It is of vital importance to yourself,"

it ran, "that you should learn what has occurred, that you may be on your guard. Be here not later than five o'clock, so that you can be home by seven."

Emily schooled herself to wear a dignified impressive demeanour, which she found it very difficult to keep up when her lover greeted her with the old warmth and tenderness. But she felt that the only tie between them was a purely physical one, and by that alone might she hope to bind him to her, and she would not so much as yield her lips to his caress.

"Now, you little rebel, give me an explanation of your extraordinary behaviour of late."

"Perhaps you will be so good as to inform me why you remained *perdu* here, while I stood outside and knocked for admission, why you never answered my letter, and why you wished me to imagine you were out?"

Lord Hardstock looked puzzled.

Emily reiterated her complaint against him.

"My dear child," said he, "I found that note of yours in my letter-box at four o'clock the next afternoon on my return from Brighton. I was not even in town when you came, I assure you."

"I don't believe a word of it. I heard

you yawn as distinctly as I ever heard anything in my life."

It was not an easy matter to throw dust in Emily's eyes.

"It is extremely likely that you have heard talking going on, for I was weak-minded enough to give the key of my rooms to a chum of mine who is desperately in love with a girl, and has no chance of meeting her except under her father's roof, where he declares he can never say a word to her that is not overheard. I took pity on him and told him he could make use of me if he liked. As a matter of fact I believe he did so."

Was he speaking the truth? Perhaps! She was longing with all her heart to be able to believe him.

"So that is why you have been so cross-grained, my child? Upon my word, you are a little goose. But, Emily, I have more cause to reproach you. How came you to be so careless as to drop any of my letters about?"

The colour faded from Emily's cheeks. "What do you mean?" she said, hastily.

"I gathered from Mrs. Armitage's manner that she had not mentioned the subject to you," continued Lord Hardstock. "She appealed to me as the primary sinner."

And he then told her exactly what had passed. Emily was very angry

"I think she ought to have come direct to me, if she had any doubt about it," she said. "I will not stay there any longer, Rupert. It is unbearable. I have said so before, but this time I mean it. We are no nearer to being married now than we were a year ago, and some understanding must be definitely arrived at between us. Do you intend to make me your wife?"

"You know I do, but these matters are not arranged in a minute. I will tell you now why I have kept you waiting. The present tenants of Greystone are giving up the place in May, and I should like to make it our home for a year or two."

Emily's eyes blazed like stars. A soft red flushed her cheeks, and she leaned forward, the incarnation of passion and emotion.

"You are not trifling with me—you mean it?"

"I mean it."

Emily choked down a sob. "At last! at last!" she was telling herself exultantly.

"Then it is settled, and we shall go down to Greystone and spend our honeymoon there?"

"Where you will—it is all one to me, if I be with you."

Do anything but love, or if thou lovest, and art a woman, hide thy love from him whom thou dost worship, never let him know how dear he is.

Poor Emily's knowledge of the world and of the hearts of men should have taught her wisdom, but in the bliss of attaining her desires she forgot all else and spoke as she felt.

"You will let me tell Mrs. Armitage?" she said, by-and-by.

"On no account. You seem to forget that I lied to her regarding that paper you lost. Your lips must be absolutely sealed, so far as she is concerned. I do not think she would be a very sympathetic confidante either."

"She is changed. I am sure something has happened to alter her whole life. She is younger, brighter, and oh! she has such a beautiful look on her face sometimes—I am not given to gush about a woman, as you know, but I cannot help looking at her. I can tell you the very day I first noticed the difference—it was a week ago yesterday. We had been out, Eva and I, and the child stopped at the drawing-room door on the way upstairs. No one answered, so we went in. Mrs. Armitage sat on the sofa, with one hand shading her

eyes. She caught Eva up in her arms and kissed her as I have never seen her do before, passionately — regretfully almost. It is no light thing which would move her, believe me.”

“And what do you think it was then?”

Lord Hardstock tried to speak indifferently, and succeeded so well that Emily saw nothing unusual about him.

“I think she has a lover.”

“Nonsense! Who in the world is there for her to fall in love with?”

“Oh! I know something,” laughed Emily, saucily “I know that some man visited her that afternoon, young, and not ill-looking, for Dr. Dale was passing the door as he came out, and asked me point blank if he was an admirer of mine.”

“And his name?”

“Ah! that I do not know, but I dare say I could find out, but I’m not curious.”

“Emily, I am going to tell you something that may perhaps surprise you. I owe Mrs. Armitage a grudge. I hate her as I never hated a woman before, and if I could work her mischief I gladly would. Help me in this. Get to know who the man was who called at Kensington that afternoon.”

Emily sat thinking. “Why do you hate her?” she asked.

“I will tell you one day, not now. Will you do this for me?”

“I will.”

And shortly after this Miss Baillie went away. What Lord Hardstock had acknowledged with regard to Mrs. Armitage astonished her greatly. Constance was not a woman to stir up animosity and ill-feeling. She was too placid and colourless for that. What then could it be that had roused Rupert's wrath against her? He was sincere enough in his expressions of ill-will. There was a look on his face and a scowl on his brow that were not to be mistaken. Was it connected with monetary matters? Ah! very probably. She knew that, owing to Mr. Armitage's sudden death, Constance had been obliged to leave Greystone, and that Lord Hardstock held a mortgage on it. Being a woman, and the wife of his dead friend, it was extremely likely that he had found it difficult to press for payment which might be in arrears. And so Emily settled the question quite satisfactorily and never came within a mile of the actual truth.

But could she have seen her lover pacing up and down his rooms, and heard the oaths he uttered as he struck out blindly in his impotent rage, she would most assuredly have realised that it was some-



thing of greater import than money that was tugging at Lord Hardstock's heart-strings—something that touched his soul more nearly than his pocket. With subtle instinct he felt that he could supply the name of Constance's visitor, and cursed his ill-luck that he should have come upon the scene again.

Two days later he had a letter from Emily, and his worst fears were realised. Basil St. Quentin had been to Kensington, and, for anything he knew to the contrary, might be in London still.

To be forewarned is to be forearmed. At all events he knew the danger that menaced him.

"I upset the card-basket and looked through the list of names with Eva's help," wrote Emily, "there was only one I did not know—Basil St. Quentin. Eva tells me he used to stay with them down at Greystone, and I think it must have been he who called on Mrs. Armitage the other afternoon."

The end of that week she wrote again.

"I am quite sure that my suspicions concerning Mrs. A. were correct. I purposely talked about Mr. St. Q. to the child, and by-and-by, when her mother came in,

she said to her : ‘Mamma, where is Basil gone? He never comes now, does he?’ Mrs. A. flushed up, and looked quite pretty. ‘How strange that you should say that, my pet. He called here a day or two ago.’ ‘Is he coming again soon?’ asked Eva. ‘No, he has gone away many hundred miles.’

“‘But he will come some day?’

“‘Yes—some day!’ echoed Mrs. A. I wish I could give you any idea of the tone in which she said it. Half shy, half joyous, wholly different to any I ever heard her use before. You may say what you like, she is entirely changed, and changed for the better, too. She is more human, more like other women. How did she vex you, Rupert? I should be sorry to work her harm—she has been good to me. I never felt for her as I do now. I want just to tell her everything—about us, I mean. She would listen, and not only understand, but sympathise now ; I know she would.”

And after this letter a very demon of rage possessed Lord Hardstock.

Had St. Quentin proposed to her? It looked like it. And if so, had she given him hope? She had not accepted him ; of that he was assured, for in that case Mrs. Strangways would have been notified.

Constance never did anything secretly. If she intended to marry again, she would speak of it quite frankly and openly. And evidently her sister had heard nothing to rouse her suspicions, for his lordship had adroitly led the conversation round to his own hopes and ambitions, and she had advised him to trust to time, as indeed she had done all along. No, nothing was settled. So much was in his favour. Where had the fellow gone?

After pondering the matter for some length of time, he resolved at last to mention St. Quentin's name the very first time he was in Constance's presence. It was nearly a fortnight later before an opportunity presented itself. They met at the house of a mutual friend. Constance and her sister had driven there together, and strolling in about six o'clock, Lord Hardstock found, as he had anticipated, a room full of visitors, and a babel of tongues all talking at once. Under cover of the noise, he edged his way round to Mrs. Armitage's chair.

"I hardly thought I should get here at all to-day," he confided to her. "I have been bothered with neuralgia. I must go to a dentist, only I hardly know who to go to. There's a fellow in Northumberland Avenue, but I can't recollect his name. I remember

St. Quentin strongly recommended him. You don't recollect who he was, do you?"

The faintest tinge crept over Mrs. Armitage's cheek, the veriest apology for a blush. Still, it was more emotion than she usually displayed.

"Really I don't know, I'm not sure. Mr. Armitage may have advised Mr. St. Quentin to go to Mr. Airlie; we always employ him when anything is wrong."

"That will do, thanks. I must give him a call. Always an unpleasant necessity going to one's dentist, isn't it? By the way, talking of Mr. St. Quentin, where is he now? I never hear you mention him."

There was no mistake about it now. Constance was evidently much embarrassed, and her eyes drooped consciously.

"He is in Constantinople, I believe."

"Is he really? Queer sort of life those beggars lead — Queen's Messengers and attachés. But I suppose he likes it."

Mrs. Armitage made no reply. She rose with suspicious alacrity to exchange a hand-shake with a lady, and at the earliest opportunity made her escape from the vicinity of her tormentor.

"Emily is right. Trust a woman to ferret out a secret." Lord Hardstock set his teeth closely together. "There is something between them, and it means—mischief."

## CHAPTER XXXII.

DR. DALE was doing well in his profession ; so well that Janet suggested they might move into a better neighbourhood and a more commodious house, but her brother ridiculed the idea. They were very comfortable ; why wish to change ? Besides, he urged that the greater number of his patients resided in West Kensington, and it would therefore be the height of folly to go elsewhere.

“It always does a medical man harm to change his address,” he said, “and in my case there is absolutely nothing to be gained by it.”

Janet was provoked, and allowed herself to speak more angrily than was her wont.

“Say at once that you don’t intend to leave Miss Baillie’s neighbourhood,” said she, “for I know as well as if you told me in so many words that she is the magnet that keeps you here. Oh, Vivian, how can you be so hoodwinked ? That girl means to entrap you into marriage, she is a horrid designing creature, and I will never, never call her sister.”

“For the simple reason that you will

never have the chance," returned Dr. Dale, calmly. Angry though he was, not a trace showed itself in voice or manner. "I dare say you will be surprised to learn that I proposed to Miss Baillie before she ever set her foot in this house, and that if she had been willing, I should have made her my wife months ago."

Janet was surprised. This announcement almost took her breath away. She could hardly believe it possible that a girl in Emily's position should have refused a man such as her brother.

"So you see," continued the doctor, "your unamiable and ungracious conduct to her was certainly uncalled for, and your estimate of her character utterly at fault and most unjustifiable."

Janet had not a word to say, and long after Dr. Dale had returned to his duties, she sat and pondered over this mystery of mysteries.

"She is simply coquetting with him then," she reflected, "and has netted a bigger fish. But I can find it easy to forgive her, since she does not want to marry Vivian."

A day or two later she returned to her project of moving into a larger house.

"We can well afford it now," she said.

"I don't intend to leave here until the

lease is up." Dr Dale spoke resolutely. "I should be sorry if you thought me mean, and as I am doing fairly well, I will buy a brougham—we can share it."

This pleased Janet, who dearly loved ease and comfort, and somewhat consoled her for her disappointment respecting another residence, but she hated Miss Baillie worse than ever, feeling assured that it was entirely on account of her proximity that her brother refused to give up his present house.

The very first visit Dr. Dale paid in his new brougham was to Mrs. Armitage.

"I am called over to Hampstead," he said, cheerily, "may I take Eva with me? It will be a change for her."

"Oh, she would be a trouble. You don't know what a restless little animal she is, for all the world like a bit of quicksilver."

"Take Miss Baillie too," cried Eva, with the triumphant air of one who had solved a knotty point.

Dr. Dale laughed a little consciously. Mrs. Armitage came to the rescue. In her own mind she suspected that there was more in the attachment between the handsome young doctor and her governess than Emily would allow, and was willing to do everything in her power to further what

could not but be a most desirable match, so she rose from her seat, saying :

“If you have room for Miss Baillie as well, of course I could have no objection. I will tell her you are here.”

Emily was irresolute. She really did not care to go. The drive to Hampstead had no charm for her. And yet—anything was better than sitting at home moping. The day was bright and clear. She would go. Dr. Dale looked well-pleased when Miss Baillie appeared ready equipped, carrying Eva’s hat and pelisse, and the little party set off in high spirits.

“I believe this little seat was just made for me,” cried Eva, bouncing up and down like an india-rubber ball.

“Some such idea occurred me when I bought the brougham,” smiled Dr. Dale.

Emily was beside him so close that her knee touched his. Life was very pleasant at that moment. They turned sharply round a corner and passed Janet, who was bent on marketing.

There was no mistaking the expression on her face, although they had but a fleeting glimpse of it. Disgust, surprise, incredulity, were all blended together.

Emily broke into a peal of silvery laughter. “We have all got into hot



water now," she said. "Why does your sister dislike me so, Dr. Dale?"

"I think you can guess," he answered, bending towards her. "Jane is jealous, I am afraid."

"And yet if it had not been me, it would be someone else. Your sister cannot expect to keep you with her always."

"But that is what it will end in. Emily, I shall never marry, unless——"

"‘Unless,’" echoed she dreamily. "Ah! who can say what fate holds for us?"

Dr. Dale had been less than man if his pulses had not bounded and his heart leapt within him, for he construed the careless words into something very much warmer than they were meant to convey.

Eva created a diversion here by tumbling headlong off her seat, and after she had been rescued and restored to a perpendicular position, the conversation became less personal.

Janet was in a white heat of rage. She had not even known that the brougham had arrived. Dr. Dale had made arrangements for keeping it at the livery stables from which he hired his horse, and she felt it a positive insult that he should have taken Miss Baillie out in her place the first time it was used. Dr. Dale was not in the

least surprised to find her in an abominable temper when he arrived home somewhere about two o'clock.

In solemn silence Janet received him. To his remark that the day was lovely, and he had just half-an-hour to get his lunch, she made no response whatever, whereupon he rang the bell and ordered the meal to be served at once. As soon as the servant had left the room and brother and sister were alone, he said, quietly :

"I can see that you are angered, Janet, and I am sorry that you should be so. I met Parker's man just outside the house, coming to tell me that the brougham had been sent there, so I went round at once, and it ended in my getting into it there and then, and——"

"And taking Miss Baillie for a drive! Allow me to congratulate you."

Janet spoke as insolently as she dared. She told herself that she did well to be angry. Her brother had acted disgracefully, and he should learn that she resented the slight he put upon her, but she was a little astonished at the tone in which he replied to her.

"Janet, we have lived together for some years, and I should be sorry for any break in our lives, but from this day you must

understand that I will allow no disparagement of the woman I love, and that when you speak slightly and insultingly of her I shall be bound to resent it."

"It is a case of 'sober second thought' then? Miss Baillie has reconsidered her decision?"

"That in no way concerns you at present, my dear Janet. Whether she ever becomes my wife or not, she is the one woman in the world I love, and I exact for her civility and respect, if you cannot find it in you to be warm and cordial."

There were tears in Janet's eyes. How changed he was! Never had he spoken so harshly to her before.

"I think you are treating me unfairly," she said. "If she is to be your wife, you ought to tell me so, for it would be quite impossible that we could both live here."

"Yes, I think it would be," he answered, gravely; "there could be no happiness for yourself nor peace for me, while you entertained the malicious feelings you now have against that poor girl. It will relieve you to hear that Miss Baillie has not done me the honour of accepting my offer of marriage—yet."

He left the room as he spoke, and Janet sat lonely and miserable.

"But that is how it will end," she

reflected. "She will marry him and I shall have to make a new home for myself. Oh, how I hate her!"

Doctors, in general, seem to enjoy an immunity from suffering, probably because they cannot spare the time to be ill, and never, during the whole course of his life, had Dr. Dale been laid up for so much as half a day. When, therefore, he came home earlier than was his wont one afternoon, stating that he did not feel very fit Janet looked up anxiously.

He felt giddy, sick, and the pain in his head was intolerable. His sister was alarmed. Surely he was not going to be ill?

"What in the world will all your patients do without you?" said she.

"Get well, most of them," said he, with a feeble attempt at a joke. Poor fellow! It was the last he made for many a long day. He had had several cases of typhus fever lately, and was now himself a victim.

Distracted with anxiety, Janet sent for advice, and when she learned the truth, burst into tears.

"What am I to do?" she cried, wringing her hands.

"Pack your boxes, and leave the house. An hysterical woman will only be in the way, and we don't want to have you down with it yourself," said the doctor, who was

an old practitioner, and by no means one to console damsels in distress.

"But if he is very ill, likely to be in danger, how can I leave him?"

Dr. Carver shrugged his shoulders.

"My dear lady, what good could you do by remaining? The fewer people in the house the better. The disease is highly contagious, and if you are going it must be at once, or it will not be safe to risk carrying the infection elsewhere."

"I suppose I must obey," said Janet, with quivering lips. "You will have a good nurse, doctor?"

"Bless the woman, what is she driving at?" he spoke testily; "does she imagine we are taking the responsibility on our own shoulders without knowing what we are about?"

"But my brother is so particular; he won't like a strange face about him."

"If he continues in his present state, he will be absolutely indifferent to both friends and strangers."

"Is he so very ill?"

"He is. Miss Dale, I give you one hour, no longer. All your preparations must be made by then, and you must be ready for departure."

Janet was an eminently practical woman. Once convinced of the wisdom and necessity

of this step, she lost no time in futile regrets. And Dr. Dale was left to the care of strangers.

It was a hand-to-hand fight with death. Nothing but his superb constitution pulled him through. Every morning Janet came for a bulletin, and it was always the same : "No change."

A charwoman had been installed in place of the neat housemaid and cook, who had both fled incontinently on hearing what the doctor was suffering from, and this doleful die-away personage took a melancholy pleasure in making the worst of everything. She was middle-aged, with a fat red face, wrinkled and creased, and soft, moist hands, which she patted together softly, the one over the other, when she talked.

How she irritated poor Janet no words could say. She would like to have heard from the nurse's own lips how her brother was progressing, but that was impossible. Dr. Carver did not wish her to go to the house even to make enquiries, but Janet could not rest. Vivian was all she had in the world, and if he died, what was to become of her? But Dr. Dale did not die. Little by little he struggled back to life and consciousness, the wraith of what he had been. So gaunt, so worn, was he, that he looked ten years older.

“You’ll pick up, sir, by-and-bye,” said the nurse with a laudable wish to console and cheer. “Rome weren’t built in a day, which to my thinking is a silly saying, for who in their sober senses ever supposed it was? It’ll take a week or two to put flesh on your bones; you must just be patient.”

It is so easy to talk. Most of us make admirable preachers, but when the point at issue concerns ourselves, it becomes quite another matter.

Dr. Dale sighed impatiently. Convalescence is a weary time, and to one so little accustomed to illness as he, it was irksome in the extreme. Little by little health and strength came back, each day saw some slight improvement, however trivial, and just a month from the day on which Dr. Carver had been summoned to his bedside, he was able to go away for a change of air, accompanied by Janet.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

A MONTH more or less in our lives does not count for much when we glance back on it. "Time gathered looks so small," but when it stares us in the face, for never-ending weeks, thirty solid days to get through, it assumes gigantic proportions.

To Constance Armitage the hours were leaden-weighted now. And yet she had been wont to say that time never stood still for her.

"Everything is changed, I think." And then she added, beneath her breath, "I, most of all!"

With a trembling hand she unlocked her wardrobe and drew forth a dainty gown of soft white silk and laces, and as she smoothed it out carefully before laying it away on an upper shelf, there was a glitter of tears in her beautiful eyes, half ashamed, half-joyous.

"He shall find no sorrowing woman when he comes back to me," she mused; "it is right that I should do him honour. When I lay my hand in his I will put by



my sombre gowns, and dress myself in white, pure white, to give him welcome."

And thus to her own heart she whispered that her choice was made. No cold, inanimate statue now, but instinct with warmth and fervour.

In the renewed youth that had crept all unaware about her, the icy mantle of reserve slipped from her shoulders, and in her love for Basil St. Quentin, in the love she acknowledged and submitted to, she was very womanly.

"This bud of love, by summer's ripening breath may prove a beauteous flower."

Over and over again she lived through that short sweet half-hour, when she had slowly awakened to a sense of her own weakness, and gloried in it. It was so little that they said, but each felt that the Rubicon was passed, and that they could never go back to the old régime again—the little more or the little less. Smiles chased away the tears, and it was a very happy face that Constance carried down to the drawing-room that afternoon. Rebecca was there, and Rebecca was uneasy.

Constance was changed. That subtle intangible something which had been apparent to Emily Baillie's apathetic gaze had communicated itself to the anxious sister, and since she had learned from Lord

Hardstock's lips that Basil St. Quentin had been in London, and seen and talked with Constance, and still she, Rebecca, was in ignorance of it, she felt that there must be a substantial reason for her reticence. Rebecca was never one to beat about the bush, and she opened fire at once.

"Why in the world did you not tell me that St. Quentin had been here?" she asked.

"He was never a great favourite of yours," replied Constance, evasively, for indeed she hardly knew what to say.

"No, you are right, he was not. He had an unpleasant habit of airing his own superiority that was obnoxious in the extreme. I hate an Admirable Crichton."

"He never claimed to be that." Constance's breath came a little quicker from between her parted lips. "He has always been a true friend and a——"

"Anyhow he managed to get you into what might have been a nasty scrape. A man is a fool, and worse, who allows his affection for a woman to compromise her."

"How unjust you are! You know as well as I do that he had nothing in the world to do with it. It was a pure accident, and he is the last man in the world to compromise a woman."

Rebecca tossed her head scornfully. "I

always thought that St. Quentin was seen by your husband in the act of kissing your hand; but I suppose I must have misunderstood the actual facts."

Thus cornered, Constance found it difficult to reply. She bit her lip with vexation.

"I hardly think it should be necessary for me to defend Mr. St. Quentin," she said, at last. "We have known him for too many years for it to be possible for you to so cruelly misjudge him. Had Cyril not been drinking, the whole thing would have passed over unnoticed; but the man you think so much of, Lord Hardstock, did his best to fan the flame. What blame there is should lie at his door. He could have no possible motive but malice for acting as he did."

"My dear Constance, you argue like a child. Lord Hardstock has proved the depth of his affection for you. Over and over again he has stood between you and harm. He would give you your own again if you would but accept it at his hands. He is everything that is generous and loyal."

"And I suppose you wish to infer that Mr. St. Quentin is not. Well, we will agree to differ." She took up her work with an air that said plainly the discussion

was at an end. But Rebecca was waxing more uneasy every moment. She did not like this championship on her sister's part. It was so unlike Constance.

"What had he to say the other day?"

"A great many things. He has gone to Constantinople with despatches. He was not here very long. Have you any more questions you would like to ask, Rebecca?" There was a saucy gleam in her eye that Rebecca had never seen there since her marriage with Cyril Armitage, and it struck a cold thrill to her heart. She scented mischief ahead.

"Yes," she answered, desperately, yet with a certain quaver in her voice. "Are you keeping anything back from me? Is there more between you and Basil St. Quentin than the world knows of? You—you are not going to be so mad as to let him love you, Constance?"

Constance's work fell on her lap.

"He has done that already; it is beyond my power to control him."

"But you will not give him any encouragement? Think how ridiculous it would be. If you marry, it must be a man with some money. Mr. St. Quentin's income barely keeps himself."

"There is no engagement between us."

Constance spoke slowly and decisively.

“But perhaps I had better tell you that if ever I do marry, it will be the man whose true worth I have proved, and whom I hold more highly honoured than any other.”

Mrs. Strangways groaned. Though her suspicions had pointed to this, the confirmation of her doubts was a terrible blow to her. She tried to speak—to argue, to urge the folly of such a step, which she could not but consider a species of moral suicide on the part of her sister, but Constance paid no heed.

“I am old enough to judge for myself,” she said, haughtily, “and I deny that any human being has a right to interfere in what I believe to be for my future happiness.”

“Then it is settled?”

“No, nothing is settled. I should not have mentioned the subject to you at all, had you not yourself mooted it. We will not talk of it any more. We will have a cup of tea—I will ring at once.”

“No,” said Mrs. Strangways, putting out her hand. “I could not touch it; it would choke me. Let me go!”

And hurriedly, with a suspicious huskiness in her voice, she left the room. To do her justice, she loved her sister, and

her grief was really great that Constance should be so blind to her own advantage.

Constance, left alone, sighed. It did seem to her extraordinary that Rebecca should have set her heart on her marrying Lord Hardstock, and yet that that was at the bottom of her disapproval of St. Quentin she was persuaded.

“Can she not see how shallow he is? I doubt if any woman would be happy as his wife. His tongue is plausible enough, and his manners are perfect; but a woman needs something more in the man she marries. I have made one mistake—I cannot afford to make another.”

Rebecca buried her misgivings in her own bosom. Not even to her liege lord did she unburden herself, for, who could tell, it might leak out and reach the ears of Lord Hardstock; and he must be kept in ignorance of Constance’s avowal as long as possible. Who could tell? It might end in smoke after all.

St. Quentin might die. A hundred unforeseen calamities might occur. No, until the die was cast, and it was too late for counsel or the intervention of a kindly fate on her behalf, Rebecca’s lips were sealed.

And be very sure that Constance spoke no word that could enlighten his lordship.

And during the days that followed, her thoughts turned but rarely to her absent lover, for she was extremely uneasy about Daphne. Gerald had written a long, sad letter from St. Cloud—where it appeared he had taken his wife on leaving Monte Carlo.

“I fear he is falling into a grave error,” Constance said, anxiously “Coercion and harshness will never do for Daphne.” And then she took up the closely-written sheets and reperused them.

Gerald was desperate. For a time all had gone well. His giddy little pleasure-loving wife had professed herself well amused, and had shown no wish to return to Paris, but just when he was feeling most secure and congratulating himself on having taken his sister-in-law’s advice, and had removed her from the dreaded intimacy with the De Maupas family, Monsieur Raoul appeared upon the scene, and Daphne greeted him with such a suspicious lack of astonishment in both voice and manner, that it was only too apparent she was expecting him.

It was too much for Gerald Armitage, and acting on the spur of the moment, without giving himself time for thought, he did the most foolish thing possible—turned his back on the young man and left Daphne for the best part of an hour alone

with him. He was so angry that he positively dared not approach her, and when Daphne came tripping coquettishly along, radiant and dimpled, he remained mute to all her pretty speeches, and by-and-by Daphne ceased talking, and in ominous silence they reached their hotel.

But when they were in their own room, the storm burst. And for once in her frivolous life, Daphne was frightened. She denied all knowledge of Monsieur Raoul's movements, although she admitted that she corresponded constantly with Madame de Maupas.

"And you can tell me that quietly?" cried her husband, "knowing, as you well do, how much I object to your intimacy with these people! But since affection and kindness have no weight with you, we will see what harsher measures will effect. From this day forward, I forbid you to address Monsieur de Maupas."

"And if I refuse to obey you?"

The mutinous mouth quivered a little, and tears were very near the starry eyes, but Gerald did not guess it; he only heard the rebellious tone and told himself that he must be firm, for that the whole happiness of the future depended upon it.

"You hardly dare do that!"



"Dare! That is a strange word to use to your wife. I say that, so long as I conduct myself with propriety, you have no right to dictate to me, or to seek to control my actions. It will be quite time enough for you to interfere when I act otherwise."

"I have not the slightest intention of waiting for that. My honour is in your hands, since you bear my name, and it behoves me to guard it."

Daphne's short upper lip curled scornfully. "Your honour is in no danger," said she, and then she flashed out suddenly, "I don't know why I am arguing with you. I tell you no, a hundred times no, you shall not choose my friends for me. I will give you no promise whatsoever. I shall see and talk to Monsieur de Maupas as often and as long as I please."

And then Mr. Armitage sat down and wrote to Constance a long account of all that had transpired, and Daphne shut herself up in her room and refused to come out. And when he found that expostulations and entreaties were alike disregarded, he carried off the irate little woman away from Monte Carlo altogether.

Daphne was terribly disgusted and a little dismayed at this wholly unexpected

move, but consoled herself with the reflection that, once at home, she could see Madame de Maupas, and Raoul would not care to remain away long after her return. But she reckoned without her host. Mr. Armitage had not the faintest intention of remaining in Paris, and when Daphne realised that she was to be buried in St. Cloud, with a jealous husband mounting guard over her, she fairly broke down and cried bitterly.

"I will kill myself. I will run away," she cried, passionately. "You are a perfect brute, a barbarian, but I am not your slave, and you shall not tyrannise over me."

Finding he answered her nothing, she dried her eyes and condescended to question him more humbly.

How long were they to stop in this hateful place? When might she go home?

"When you are cured of your folly, and have come to your senses," replied Gerald gravely.

"I believe you want to drive me mad. You would be glad if I died."

"My poor child—Daphne—think what you are saying."

"I do—I know you hate me as much as I hate you!"

Then there was a little silence. Mr. Armitage's face had grown curiously white.

She could see it reflected in the mirror above the mantel-shelf. Perhaps her conscience pricked her a little. She was on the point of speaking, and who knows whether the misery that was in store for the poor, foolish girl might not have been averted had she done so, but the moment of grace went by.

“You hate me!”

“With my whole heart and soul I hate and despise you.”

“Some day I will remind you of what you have said; for the present let it pass. I am your husband. Whatsoever your feelings may be towards me, nothing can alter that fact, and I am in a measure responsible for your conduct; therefore I am acting for the good of both. You will remain at St. Cloud until I am assured that you will do my bidding, and that I need fear nothing in the future.”

“Then we shall live and die and be buried here,” cried wilful Daphne, “for I will never give in to you, never, never!”

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

It is thankless work to act as mediator. One is irresistibly reminded of the scissors, the blades of which move in different directions, yet cruelly punish those who are rash enough to get between. Constance was loth to interfere, yet she felt that her brother-in-law was acting most injudiciously, and that harm could not but come of it. And she was the more confirmed in this belief, when a few days later she received an epistle from Daphne, wholly characteristic of that small personage, incoherent, wild, passionate and rebellious.

She smiled as she read — the whole production was so like that of a spoiled child thwarted for her own good; and then she sighed, for she realised how serious it was, and what utter misery might result from it all.

What was to be done? How could she, Constance, at a distance, quell the disturbance? And yet each appealed to her.

“You, who have so much influence with her,” wrote Gerald.

“He will listen to you. Tell him he must

treat me more kindly, or I will do something desperate," pleaded Daphne.

"Well, I will do my best. God knows the spirit is willing. With all my heart I long to help them both, and yet I see no way out of the maze."

Constance folded up the blotted ink-stained sheets and laid them by. What she wrote in reply I cannot say, but on the very day that Mr. Armitage received her letter he took his wife back to Paris. Daphne was subdued and humbled. She, too, had had her share of friendly counsel, and for the moment was touched, and alive to the gentler tone her husband adopted towards her.

She was glad, oh, so glad, to go back home. The life at St. Cloud was irksome to the last degree. She had ventured once to write to her friends in the Rue St. Honoré, but in some incomprehensible way Mr. Armitage had possessed himself of the letter, and sternly ordered her to destroy it, and, unwilling, perhaps, that he should see or read what she had written, she obeyed. After that she made no further attempt to correspond with them, but she did not hide how unhappy she was. She would not talk, merely shrugging her shoulders peevishly when addressed; and she spent the greater part of her

time lying on the sofa with her eyes shut.

“What was she thinking of?” Gerald wondered, as his eyes rested on the baby face, with its soft pink and white prettiness, and the fair brow puckered and drawn together, while the corners of the rosy mouth drooped sadly. How he hated to vex her! For, in spite of her naughtiness, she was very dear to him. In his heart he forgave her all, even the cruel words that had stabbed him to the quick, but which, viewed by the strong light of common sense, he told himself she could never have meant in all sternness and reality.

To “hate” a person was an everyday occurrence with Daphne, and nine times out of ten merely conveyed the impression that she was displeased with them.

“Daphne, would you like to go back to Paris?”

She looked up at him with a pathetic little gesture, but she did not speak.

“I am going to try you again—to trust you, Daphne—to put you on your honour not to do what I disapprove of. You will not disappoint me, dear?”

Daphne would have purchased her freedom at a far greater sacrifice than the utterance of a few careless phrases which meant absolutely nothing to herself, and

she made glib promises, and nodded her pretty head affirmatively, and forthwith began to pack her trunks.

"Hateful place! I hope I shall never see you again," she cried at the last, shaking her small clenched fist in the direction of St. Cloud, as the train bore them swiftly back to Paris.

"I wonder what she said to soften my bear?" she was thinking, as she lay back in her corner and surveyed her husband surreptitiously from beneath her thick curly lashes, "for of course I know that I owe my deliverance to Constance. She pulled the strings that made the puppet dance."

Mr. Armitage did not trust so implicitly to his little wife's promises of good behaviour as she expected him to do. He rarely left her alone, and she overheard him giving orders to Louise that Madame de Maupas was not to be admitted to her salon, and this made Daphne very angry. "He treats me like a child," she pouted, "and expects me to behave like a woman of the world." And she immediately set her busy brain to work to devise a plan by which she could circumvent him.

"I am going to Madame Hortense—I suppose you will not care to accompany me?" she said a day or two later.

“On the contrary, yes. Why not?”

Daphne bit her lip, but made no protest, and her husband waited patiently for more than an hour while his wife had her dress fitted on. She was only in the next compartment, he could hear her voice chattering volubly, for the partition that divided them was not more than five feet high.

He could hear her, and was quite easy, but it was lucky he could not see, or it is doubtful whether he would have gone away in so equable a frame of mind. Daphne drew forth a pencil and sheet of paper, hastily scribbled a few lines on it, talking all the time, while Madame Hortense stood calmly by, scenting an intrigue in the air, and laughing in her sleeve at the clever trick Madame was playing her husband.

But when the envelope was thrust into her hand, with a whispered word of admonition, she was a good deal surprised to find that it was addressed to a lady, and a little puzzled to account for the diplomacy and manœuvring required. “Mais oui, Madame!” The letter was crushed into Madame’s pocket, and Daphne emerged beaming.

“At three o’clock to-morrow,” she said, smiling her sweetest; “the dress will be ready by then and I will be here.”



"What, again! good gracious, how many times is it necessary to fit a gown on?" demanded Mr. Armitage.

"As many as its wearer pleases," returned Daphne, with unruffled serenity. Her eyes sparkled, and in her wayward heart she was saying a small Jubilate.

On the following afternoon, promptly as the clock struck three, she mounted the white staircase that led to Madame Hortense's show-rooms. Mr. Armitage accompanied her to the door, and gave a quick glance around, but the apartment was empty.

"I think I will smoke a cigar below," he said to his wife as he prepared to descend.

"Do," murmured Daphne. "I shall be some time engaged."

The moment the door was shut, she whisked round the corner of the partition, and found, as she knew she would, the plump figure of Madame de Maupas wedged in among the hanging skirts with which the wall was covered. How much there was to tell; and Daphne was by no means reticent. She told her friend in just so many words that Mr. Armitage disliked her, and had commanded her to give up her friendship.

"But that I never will do," said Daphne,

with a tragic air, "and I told him so, and for the crime of loving you I have been buried alive in St. Cloud. It is too hard."

"It is not I whom Monsieur fears, but my brother," purred Madame.

Daphne blushed generously, over brow and cheek. "Well," she said, "am I never then to speak to one of my own age? It is too absurd."

Yes, Madame agreed with her. It was quite too ridiculous, and Daphne had done well in standing her ground. Ah! *ces hommes! ces hommes!* They were all tyrants. A woman must needs plant her foot down firmly if she meant to have any peace or happiness in her life.

"And Raoul," began Daphne, "is he back in Paris yet?"

"He returned as soon as he found that you had flown, and he called yesterday upon you, but you were not at home."

"Nor am I likely to be while my husband remains in his present frame of mind. It is too bad. Are we never to meet?"

"It will be difficult, but not impossible." Madame de Maupas' voice had sunk to a mere whisper. Hortense's ear, glued to the partition, could catch but the faintest murmur.

"Are you brave enough to run some small risk?"

Yes, Daphne felt quite brave and valiant, feeling she could remove mountains, and thinking it very great fun to outwit her husband. And then Madame de Maupas whispered into the small pink ear, and Daphne's eyes danced with mischief, and she clapped her hands delightedly. For the next two or three weeks Daphne was a model wife.

"Her own sweet self again," Gerald told himself, joyfully.

She was content to stay at home unless he wished to go out, and in that case ready and pleased to accompany him. The matrimonial horizon had cleared and there was a prospect of peace ahead. Never once did it cross Mr. Armitage's mind that beneath the placid waters there might be a turbulent swell. To all outward appearance Daphne was content, and he knew that she was acting as he would have her do, for the simple reason that he gave her no loophole for disobedience or rebellion.

The bird was tamed, and a long letter went to Constance to tell her of the glad change. But from Daphne there came no word and when, in answer to one of hers, there was still only silence, Constance found it difficult to see things in quite the roseate aspect that her brother-in-law did. Perhaps she had more thoroughly gauged the

scheming brain and narrow little soul, and felt that there was more to contend with than Gerald suspected.

For that Daphne was really happy in such a monotonous life as she was now leading, she knew must be quite impossible. Therefore, if she feigned a contentment, she did so for some purpose of her own.

“Do not draw the reins too tightly—remember how much liberty she has had,” wrote Constance in reply, and then hesitated. Should she say a word of caution—the merest hint?

No. Better not. Gerald was on the spot. He must be a better judge of how things really were than she could be. But after her letter was sealed and posted she regretted her decision, for a vague, nameless fear hung over her, a subtle instinct that warned her of coming evil. Daphne differed so essentially from other women, it was difficult to know exactly how to treat her. Rules, laid down for the guidance of her sex, somehow needed adapting before pressing upon her. Hastiness and severity would inevitably defeat their object. Of that she was assured, and yet, given her own way and unlimited freedom, ten to one she would abuse it.

That there was real good underlying the surface-shallowness and froth there was

little doubt; but was Gerald the man to probe until he found it?

Constance was by no means sure. A nature as light and mercurial as that of her little sister-in-law would be incapable of appreciating the depths of tenderness and devotion Gerald Armitage cherished for his young wife. It was more than likely to prove irksome.

“How came Gerald to choose such a wife?” she pondered sadly. “They have hardly a taste or sympathy in common. It is a great pity.”

## CHAPTER XXXV.

“MY DEAREST CONSTANCE,

“I have refrained from writing, although you did not forbid me to do so, wishing to leave you absolutely free and unbiassed in your decision. You hold my future in your hands—I speak no word of love. If you could see into my heart you would know how wholly and absolutely it is yours. Dear—tell me, may I come and take my answer from your lips? I shall be at the Metropole on Thursday week.

“Until then, Yours devotedly,

“BASIL ST. QUENTIN.”

“She is really growing very lovely,” Miss Baillie reflected, as she watched Constance reading this letter, “and she looks so much younger than she used to do, and no longer so anxious and care-worn.” And then Emily carried Eva off to the school-room, and Mrs. Armitage was left to her musings.

Thursday! And this was already Tuesday. Before that day was over, Miss Baillie awakened to another fact connected with Constance, that had not struck her

disagreeably before. Mrs. Armitage was nervous.

She, the least emotional of women, narrowly escaped a genuine attack of hysterics, and such an absurdly trifling affair to make a fuss over!

Eva had surreptitiously carried her ball into the drawing-room, and thrown a quaint-shaped vase from the bracket where it stood to the ground, and it lay dashed in a hundred pieces on the hearthrug. Eva was the picture of consternation and remorse, knowing full well that she was prohibited from any such games below stairs.

When Constance, startled by the crash, ran hastily in, she flew to her and buried her face in her gown.

And then it was that, glancing at the empty bracket and the wreck at her feet, Mrs. Armitage burst into tears, sobbing and laughing alternately.

"How foolish!" she said at length, as she dried her eyes. "I was startled, and —" the tears burst forth anew. "To-day of all days," Miss Baillie heard her murmur to herself, though why to-day should differ from yesterday or the one before that, she would have been puzzled to decide.

That vase had been given to Constance

by Basil St. Quentin, and it is needless to say that she prized it highly. It was almost the only thing he had ever given her, and although she was not a superstitious woman as a rule, she could not but regard this accident in the light of an ill-omen.

But the days wore away and nothing calamitous happened, and when the morning of the 10th of April dawned, it found her almost childishly happy and expectant. She would not trust herself to write more than a line.

"I shall be at home to-night at seven. Come."

That was all. It did not tell him much, and yet—"He will know, he *must* know what my answer is," she thought wistfully, and she carefully sealed the envelope, and despatched it by a messenger lad to the Metropole.

An answer? No—there would be none! A smile rippled over her face. She was so supremely happy. It seemed as if only now had she realised how supremely blessed a woman's life might be, brimful of hope and contentment. And then she went softly upstairs and shut herself up in her own room and was seen no more. Eva and her governess dined alone.

Mrs. Armitage was expecting visitors



Miss Baillie learned a little to her surprise, and there would be a late dinner.

Emily would not have scrupled to press her enquiries, but that she shrewdly suspected there was no more to be learned, and that the servants were as much in the dark as she herself as to the identity of the expected guest. But when, about a quarter to seven, or perhaps a little earlier, she met Mrs. Armitage on the stairs, it must be confessed she experienced a prodigious shock. Constance was calmly fastening a pearl bracelet that had dropped apart, and she was dressed in white from head to foot, she who had worn the sable garb of widowhood so long—in dainty silk and lace, with a bud or two of sweet smelling narcissus in her bosom. Her luxuriant hair, no longer hidden by the envious cap, was coiled loosely on the top of her head, and hung prettily upon her brow. But it was not only her dress that astonished the governess, it was the extraordinary, undefinable change that had taken place. Her eyes were humid and starry, a delicate rose burned on her cheek. She was the incarnation of loveliness and joy. She smiled at Emily as she passed — a little consciously perhaps, but with a certain pride.

“Who is the man?” asked Emily, when

she found herself alone. "Who has warmed the icicle into life and beauty? I must find out who the visitor is whom madam delights to honour." She had not long to wait.

When the front door bell rang loudly, and steps—the heavy footfall of a man—came up the stairs to the drawing-room, Constance put her hand to her side, her heart beat so thick and fast it was positive pain. But when the door opened the colour faded from her face—it was Lord Hardstock who advanced to greet her.

Was ever anything so annoying? What could have brought him here at so *mal-à-propos* a moment? And how was she to get rid of him? While these thoughts were passing through her mind, his lordship, almost as amazed as Miss Baillie had been at the brilliant apparition that met his gaze, was apologising for this late visit.

"I ought to have been here more than an hour ago, but I am ashamed to confess that I wasted the best part of the afternoon over billiards. What I ran up to see you about is this: I have a box at the Garrick for to-morrow night. Will you go if I can persuade Mrs. Strangways to accompany us?"

"Thank you, it would be quite im-

possible." Constance was on tenter-hooks. At any moment St. Quentin might arrive.

"You are going out?" said his Lordship tentatively. Constance grasped at the excuse.

"I am," she said, breathlessly, "and to tell you the truth I am late."

"Ah!" He rose at once. "Then I will say good-night. I hope you will re-consider your decision about the Garrick. I believe there is rather a good play there just now, and—" He was devouring her with glances of the warmest admiration.

"You are surprised that my time of mourning should have expired?" she said with a nervous laugh.

"No," he answered. "If I had had my will, you should never have put on widow's weeds for such a man as Cyril Armitage. He was never worthy of you, Constance."

Before she could reply, a double rat-tat resounded through the house. It was too late! The men would meet. Constance could almost have wept. Instinctively her eyes sought the door.

"A telegram, madam."

With a sigh of relief she tore it open, read the few words it contained, and sank back, quivering in every limb.

“What has happened?” Without waiting for permission, Lord Hardstock took the flimsy paper from between her fingers and possessed himself of its contents.

“From Mrs. Armitage. Les Trois Princes, Amiens. Come to me at once. I dare not return to Paris. DAPHNE.”

“I must start at once.” In a dazed, bewildered fashion, Constance pushed the hair from her brow and looked up appealingly into Lord Hardstock’s face.

“You are not seriously thinking of going to-night?”

“I must. God only knows what folly that poor child has been guilty of, and if I am to catch the mail there is no time to be lost. Do not let me detain you.”

Lord Hardstock took the slender hand she extended and pressed it warmly.

“If you are determined, I shall go with you,” he said, and she made no demur. When the door had closed upon her, he quietly put the telegram into his pocket and went down to the dining-room.

The moment he pushed open the door the mystery of the dainty apparel explained itself. Mrs. Armitage was not dining out, as she would have it appear, but was expecting a visitor.

Ah! Ah! His lordship promptly rang the bell.

"Get me a glass of sherry, will you?" he said to Phœbe, who answered his summons, "and then call a cab at once."

"But——" the girl gasped.

"Yes, yes, I know." He seized the decanter and poured out a tumbler full. "Do as you are bid, and don't wait to ask questions. Give me pen and paper."

He then scribbled a few lines, which he folded and handed to the astonished maid, deftly accompanying it with a gold coin.

"Give that to Miss Baillie after we are gone," he said, almost in a whisper, for he could hear Constance on the stairs.

She came in, very pale, her travelling cloak about her shoulders, and a small bag in her hand. At the door she paused and would have retreated.

"Eva," she said. "I had forgotten her. I cannot go without bidding her good-bye."

"Nonsense. You will lose the train. Come, Constance."

She never noticed that he used her Christian name, but Phœbe did. She had hailed a hansom, and stood open-mouthed, drinking in every word.

"Tell Miss Baillie I will write," said

Constance, in desperation. In another minute they were gone.

Eva was putting her toys away and wondering very much why her governess did not come to the nursery, for it was her bedtime, and for once she was feeling sleepy and tired. Miss Baillie had been gone a long time.

"Aren't you in bed, my dear?" It was Phœbe's voice at the open door.

"No," said Eva, in a tone of resignation, "I'm waiting very patiently."

"Bless the child." Phœbe advanced into the room. "It's a shame to leave you alone. She's read her letter a score of times by now; well, she'll have to come down!" and she forthwith marched up to Miss Baillie's door and knocked loudly.

"What do you want?" The voice was muffled.

"A gentleman in the drawing-room, miss, as says he must see someone directly"

A pause, and then, "Who is it?"

"Mr. St. Quentin is the gentleman's name, I believe, but I left his card in the hall."

"I will be down in a minute."

There was a sound of water splashing, and a minute or two later the key turned in the lock. Miss Baillie had gone down to interview Mrs. Armitage's lover.

Her eyes were red and swollen and her face distorted with passionate weeping, and in the bosom of her gown lay crumpled Rupert Hardstock's cruel letter.

"It is kinder to tell you the truth, Emily, and I do so in a few words. Mrs. Armitage has left London with me to-night. We shall be married in Paris."

"You wished to see me!"

"No, madam, I wish to see Mrs. Armitage, but I am told she is from home—has been summoned abroad."

"Mrs. Armitage has eloped with Lord Hardstock."

"What! My God, what are you saying? It is a lie!"

"It is the truth. He was my lover, and she has taken him from me." The dreary pathos in her tone brought conviction to him, and he grasped the back of a chair to steady himself, for, strong man though he was, his brain reeled.

"There is—there must be—some hideous mistake."

"None. He came here less than an hour ago, and she went with him of her own free will. The servants will corroborate what I say. She left a message for me—none for her child."

"If an angel came down from Heaven to persuade me I would not believe it."

"Convince yourself. They catch the eight o'clock mail. You will have time to get to Charing Cross."

He was down the stairs and out of the house almost before she had ceased speaking.

"I wish I could kill her!" It would have fared ill with Constance Armitage if she had been within reach of the clenched hand. With a moan of despair Emily flung herself face downwards on the couch.

"Ah, fool that I have been!" she cried. "Fool! fool! to think that a man would care to purchase what he might take for asking. But I gave him my all, my love, my life, myself, and he has shaken me off like some noxious animal—spurned me—deserted and left me to die; but I will live—live to be avenged."

Basil St. Quentin was just in time to see Lord Hardstock jump into the train, and to catch a glimpse of a pale sweet face at the window—the face of Constance Armitage.

Then it was true! True!

She had fooled him to the top of his bent, and was now laughing at him!

"Well, I have her answer," he muttered, between his teeth. "She promised it to me to-night, and—she has kept her word."



## CHAPTER XXXVI.

DAPHNE'S angelic state of mind still continued. Not even in the first days of the honeymoon had she been so docile and submissive. Gerald Armitage felt that some good fairy must have waved her wand over the curly head and transformed her into a model wife, and was proportionately grateful.

It did occur to him that she paid a good many visits to Madame Hortense, but he was not a man to grudge a few pounds over a woman's whims, and if it pleased his little wife to be extravagant in the matter of gowns, he would not say her nay. So Daphne went her reckless way, and her luckless husband was in happy ignorance of the treachery that lurked beneath that smiling exterior. When business called him to Bordeaux he went without the slightest misgiving. He would be away two days at latest, and he could trust his darling.

"If you wish it, I will not go out at all," said she, with her arms round his neck and her dimpled cheek laid close to his.

„No," he would neither ask nor expect

that of her. She knew what his wishes were, and all he asked was that she would regard them. He kissed the blooming face and left her with a light heart.

Perhaps a little feeling of compunction kept her indoors all that day. Even to her dwarfed sense of honour it seemed a mean and contemptible thing to deceive the man who trusted her so implicitly, but the next morning all such scruples had taken to themselves wings. She remembered only that she was free, her jailer away, and that it would be very pleasant to see Raoul de Maupas. But she must act with the utmost discretion. A visit to Hortense resulted in a note to Madame which that lady received between three and four o'clock. She twisted it impatiently between her fingers, uncertain how to act, for her brother-in-law had gone out, and would not be in until much later. At last she put on her hat and went round to Hortense.

Daphne was still there and her face fell considerably when she saw her friend. Where was Raoul?

"Oh, my dear child, luck is against you." And Madame de Maupas explained matters.

Daphne could have cried, she felt so disappointed.

"I don't know when I shall have such a chance again," she pouted ; "Gerald never, never goes away."

"Ah! I have it, you shall come with me. He will be back soon, you can have one little glimpse of each other."

It was difficult to say why Madame de Maupas encouraged this flirtation. I believe that it was more from sheer lazy good nature than anything else, for she was not bad at heart and Raoul had enlisted all her sympathies. It must always be remembered that, to a Frenchman, an intrigue with a married woman is an everyday affair, and if Raoul had a caprice for another man's wife, it was nothing surprising and, indeed, only what one might expect, considering the disparity in years between Daphne and her husband.

But Angèle looked at matters from a wholly different point of view. Raoul was very dear to her, and until Daphne came between them she had fondly hoped that he would ask her to be his wife. In a hundred ways he had shown his preference for her, but now——

"I doubt if he even knows I am there," she told herself, bitterly. Angèle had left her *première jeunesse* behind. Her glass told her that she was faded, fine lines were tracing themselves about the corners of her

eyes. Then, too, she was not clever, and in fact she had nothing to recommend her beyond a surface wit and power of repartee, and her temper, which once was of the sunniest, I am bound to confess had become decidedly crabbed and sour. Angèle was verging on old-maidism, and the prospect daunted her.

"If it were not for that doll-faced chit, all would be well," she mused, sadly. "What right had she to force herself between him and me?" "The only one I ever had," she might have added, but in such matters women are reticent even to their own hearts. Angèle tried to persuade herself that she was irresistible, and fondly recalled the honeyed words and pleasant little attentions Raoul had been wont to pay her in the halcyon past. She felt so helpless, in no way might she hope to remedy the evil. She was too wise to speak slightly of Daphne, that would but have betrayed her jealous feelings and provoked mirth on the part of her sister, and she was a little in awe of Madame, who could be aggravatingly sympathetic on occasion. More than once she had bemoaned the lack of suitors for Angèle's hand, and when that young lady had tartly replied that for her part she was in no great hurry to be mar-

ried, she had smiled benevolently, adding:

“My dearest Angèle, every woman wishes for an establishment of her own, even if she is not anxious for a husband, and in your case it is unfortunately not a question of option, but necessity, since you have no *dot*.”

“And if I had, I would have the spending of it myself,” Angèle retorted, “and snap my fingers at men.”

“But as you have not, don’t you think it would be wiser to cultivate a more amiable spirit, dear?”

Angèle had bounced out of the room in a fury, and she never forgot or forgave her sister for her plain speaking. She thought it a gratuitous piece of unkindness on Madame’s part to encourage Raoul in his silly flirtation with Mrs. Armitage, and in her heart of hearts vowed that retribution should come to all three.

And it was about this time that fate played into her hands. Madame de Maupas’ visits to Hortense first attracted her attention. What did she go there for?

Not to order new gowns, for her prices were far beyond their modest means. She offered to accompany her sister, but Félicie promptly declined. Then, by sheer accident she discovered that she met Daphne

there, and was determined to probe the mystery to the bottom.

"We never see Mrs. Armitage now," she said, feeling her way; "have they not returned?"

Raoul, who was present, looked up from his book.

"Weeks ago!" he replied curtly, dropping his eyes again.

"Have we then been so unfortunate as to offend her, or is she ill?"

"Neither, I believe."

"Are you the culprit, Raoul?" she then asked, shaking her finger rebukingly at him. "Have your eyes told too flattering a tale and scared the pretty bird?"

"It pleases Mademoiselle Angèle to be enigmatical," was Raoul's sole rejoinder to this pleasantry. A minute later he quitted the room. Félicie turned angrily to her sister.

"What possessed you to introduce Mrs. Armitage's name?" she cried. "Have you no brains, that you cannot see it is a sore subject?"

"Why should it be?" Angèle settled herself comfortably in her chair and joined the tips of her slender fingers together. She loved an argument. "What has she to do with us?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Then where is the harm in mentioning

her? You and she were such dear friends before she went to Monte Carlo that I may surely be pardoned for wondering what has chanced to part you."

Félicie was silent. She did not care to enlighten Angèle. In her own mind she thought her sister was making a fool of herself, for she felt convinced that Raoul de Maupas had not the faintest intention of marrying her, and, all things considered, she preferred that he should remain single. He was an agreeable companion, and a man about the house was always an acquisition, and his income made a considerable difference to their expenses. He was generous, even lavish where he felt his wishes were studied.

"My dear girl, for some reason known only to yourself you do not like Mrs. Armitage," she replied, evasively

"Now, Félicie, you don't intend to infer that that is the reason her visits here have ceased. I am scarcely likely to believe that. Have you seen her at all since her return?"

"Yes, I have."

"Oh, you have called upon her?"

"No, I met her accidentally."

Angèle asked no more questions. She saw very plainly that she was to be kept in the dark, and deeply resented it. But she

would not be worsted. She would watch and wait. A letter came by hand for Madame one morning bearing Madame Hortense's seal upon the envelope, and without giving herself time for reflection, she tore it open and rapidly mastered its contents.

“At four this afternoon.”

It was not even signed. A few minutes later Félicie entered the room, and walked straight up to the mantel-shelf.

“Is there not a letter for me?” she asked, seeing nothing there.

“I am so sorry, Félicie,” replied Angèle, calmly. “A bill or something of the sort came half-an-hour ago. I was looking over some old letters and papers and destroying them, and I believe it must have got mixed up with them and is burned. It could not have been of much consequence—it was only from Hortense. Trust her to send it in again soon enough.”

Félicie bit her lip. “It is not like you to be so careless,” she said, sharply. But she had not the faintest suspicion of the truth. As it chanced she had met Madame Hortense in the street and learned that a letter had been sent to her, and that an appointment was made for four o'clock. A



good deal to Angèle's surprise, her sister proclaimed her intention of remaining at home that afternoon. It was strange. But what was stranger still, at half-past three Raoul came in, so tired, he declared he could not move another step, whereupon Félicie beckoned him into the inner salon, and after a whispered word or two, he ran blithely upstairs and must speedily have overcome his fatigue, for within ten minutes Angèle heard the outer door shut. He had gone out.

The appointment then, was with him. Oh, it was iniquitous! scandalous! disgraceful! And Félicie could sit there calmly and countenance it all. Angèle paced the room in a perfect paroxysm of rage and virtuous indignation. So her sister was the go-between, the cat's paw; and Raoul and Mrs. Armitage met by her connivance and arrangement. And then Angèle took comfort in an old English adage and told herself triumphantly that "those laughed best who laughed last," and that her day was still to come. When therefore Félicie walked in one afternoon followed closely by Daphne herself, she could not restrain a start of surprise.

"You are a stranger!" she said, graciously enough. "We never see you now."

Daphne murmured something about being busy which was not intelligible.

"What brought her to the Rue St. Honoré?" wondered Angèle.

"You will stay and have dinner with us?" pleaded Félicie.

And then Angèle learned that Mr. Armitage was from home, which somewhat explained matters.

Daphne required very little pressing. It had all been arranged beforehand, that Angèle could see at a glance. Really they must think her very obtuse if they imagined they would so easily throw dust in her eyes.

Daphne was carried off to Félicie's own room, from which she did not emerge until the dinner hour.

Raoul came in ten minutes before. Angèle heard his step and went out to meet him, smiling her sweetest.

"Guess," said she, "who is here!"

"How can I guess?" he cried, impatiently. "Let me pass, Angèle, I am off to Amiens to-night and shall barely have time."

"To Amiens? What takes you there?"

"Business," he said curtly, caring nothing who Félicie's visitor might be. But when he opened the salon door and saw the little figure ensconced in a big easy chair,

his face lighted up, and with a quick step he crossed the floor, speaking a few words rapidly in a half whisper. Angèle's sharp ear caught the familiar "*tu, toi,*" which was all that was needed to confirm her suspicions.

Dinner over, Daphne was anxious to return home. Gerald would be back within an hour or two, and she must be there to greet him, and it was only natural that Raoul should offer to drive her back on his way to the station. For half a second she demurred.

It was running a risk. And yet Daphne wished it so much that her better judgment was stifled. With a smile she acquiesced, hastily donned her walking attire and ran lightly down the stone staircase followed by Raoul, who paused to bid his sister-in-law good-bye.

"Home to-morrow," he called out, as he waved his hand gaily. Angèle behind the portière watched him hand his companion into a *fiacre* and take his place beside her, and she set her teeth savagely together.

"He had not the civility to bid me farewell. Never mind, I count for nothing now, but *qui vivra, verra.*"

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

“*Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte,*” and having yielded so much, it seemed but a trifle more to allow herself to be persuaded into driving with Monsieur Raoul as far as the station itself, instead of being dropped at her own door, and Daphne consented, when after a hurried glance at his watch the young man declared that he would all but lose his train, the stupid coachman was so slow “A quarter past eight! I shall just do it.” He hurried in, closely followed by Daphne.

“Oh, come along,” he said, when she would have bidden him farewell. “I shall be off in a minute.”

He had a carriage to himself, and flung his bags and wraps in.

“After all,” he said, “we need not have hurried, we have five minutes yet before the train starts. Don't go.”

“Where is my parcel?” asked Daphne, suddenly “I gave it to you in the carriage. Have you left it behind?”

“No, it is here.”

Daphne climbed up into the carriage and took it from him.

"There, sit down. How I wish you were coming with me! We should have it all to ourselves. You might just as well come a little way, you could get out and return by the next train."

"Oh, no. Think what it would be if I did not get back until after Mr. Armitage had returned." She turned pale at the thought. "I had better get out now," she added, nervously. The next instant she had shrunk back in dismay, crouching away out of sight.

"He is there—see—Gerald himself! Oh, what am I to do? I am lost!"

"Nonsense!" Monsieur de Maupas sprang to his feet and leaned leisurely out of the window, blocking up the aperture and effectually screening Daphne. A shriek—a loud whistle—and the train began to move.

"Stop," cried the girl, wildly. "I must get out. For God's sake, stop!"

"It is impossible." The young man threw himself beside her and coolly possessed himself of the trembling hands. "It is too late now. We must just make the best of it. It was very unlucky that your husband should have returned earlier than you anticipated, but you cannot expect me to be heart-broken over it, since it has secured to me a couple more hours in your society."

"Of course I shall get down at the next station."

"This train does not stop until we reach Amiens."

"What do you mean?" she asked in surprise.

Daphne grew as white as death. Then she faced him sternly.

"Why did you lie to me?" she said. "You yourself proposed that I should go as far as Creil, and return by the next train to Paris. If you knew that this was an express, you were wilfully deceiving me."

"Bébé," he said, "my pretty Bébé, why need you go back at all?" and he unfolded the diabolical plan he had been cogitating for months past. Fate had thrown the girl into his arms, and he never doubted but that by cajolery and sophistry he would keep her, but as Daphne listened her eyes gleamed angrily, and she held her breath; she let him have his say, interrupting him by not so much as a word, and, deceived by her manner, at last he flung his arm around her waist and pressed his lips to her soft face. To his intense surprise the girl clenched her hand and struck him a sharp, sudden blow, wrenching herself from his grasp.

"Leave my husband, for—you!" she cried. "A man who has no spark of

honour in his whole composition, who stoops to trade upon a woman's credulity and weakness! Coward that you are. Never, never!"

"One thing is certain," remarked the Frenchman with a sneer, "your husband will hardly be prepared to pardon this escapade, and in that case what is to become of you? You will think better of it—I am sure you will—and instead of remaining at Amiens we will cross over to England."

Daphne lifted her eyes full of the scorn that filled her bosom. "Is monsieur doing me the honour of wishing to make me his wife?"

Raoul shrugged his shoulders.

"My husband will, of course, divorce me."

"We will wait and see what happens; matters will arrange themselves."

"And it is to the honour of such a man that I am to trust myself? No; I prefer to cast myself upon the mercy of my husband. I have disobeyed and deceived him, but he will believe in my innocence of all wish for wrong-doing." Her voice broke and she covered her face with her hands. How wicked she had been, how foolish! To do the girl justice, frivolous, and eaten up with vanity though she was, this was the sum and substance of her offending.

Her stolen interviews had been charming, commending themselves to her as much because of the spice of naughtiness and romance they contained as for the sake of the pretty compliments she received. The whole thing had been a huge joke in Daphne's eyes. It was such fun to get ahead of Gerald, to laugh in her sleeve, seeing how easily she could hoodwink him, but now her eyes filled with tears, hot tears of shame and mortification. By her own folly she had placed herself in her present position, and she had only her own culpability to thank for the insulting proposition this man had dared to make her. She withdrew to the farthest corner and turned her head steadily away. For fully half an hour Monsieur de Maupas argued and coaxed.

He would marry her he said, if she exacted it, and if the law freed her. Never a word said Daphne, but her lips straightened themselves into a long, uncurving line, and the utter contempt she felt for her companion expressed itself in every line of her lovely little face.

And on rushed the train, bearing her every moment further and further away from her husband and her home. It was almost dark by the time they reached Amiens. Feeling dazed and stupefied,



Daphne rose from her seat and made her way to the door. Monsieur de Maupas sprang on to the platform and held out his hand to help her to alight, but she pushed it aside and got out unassisted. She had no notion where to go, or what to do; all she desired was to free herself from his hated presence. Luckily she had her purse with her, and thus was not penniless.

"We had better go to 'Le Duc d'Orléans,'" he said composedly. "I believe it is a very good hotel."

Daphne did not deign to answer, but marched out of the station, closely followed by the young man. There were several *fiacres* waiting. Accosting the driver of one, she asked him if he could recommend a quiet and inexpensive hotel, and a minute later she got in, and pulled the door to after her.

"Come, Daphne, this is carrying things too far," cried Monsieur de Maupas angrily. "Of course I am coming with you."

"I absolutely decline to permit you to do any such thing." Daphne held her small head very high. "Drive on," she said to the coachman.

But the young man was not to be shaken off so easily. He engaged another *fiacre* and followed as rapidly as possible. While

she was still in the entrance hall he came to her side.

"Let us be friends," he said uneasily. "I will urge nothing that is repugnant to you. I swear it."

Daphne looked him blankly in the face as if she had never seen him before in her life. "Monsieur evidently mistakes me for someone else," she said in a loud, clear voice, for the benefit of the landlady and a couple of servants. "I have not the honour of his acquaintance," and deliberately turned her back upon him.

The next moment she had disappeared up the stairs. Raoul de Maupas swore fiercely and tugged at the ends of his long moustache, but he was bound to confess himself defeated.

"What a little devil the girl is! I should never have given her credit for so much spirit."

Upstairs, with her door shut and locked, and a heavy bureau pushed close to it, to make it doubly secure, Daphne was sobbing wildly and without an attempt at restraint. Now that she was alone and had nothing to fear, her anger and pride melted away, and she felt the frightful position she was placed in, and the difficulty of extricating herself from it. It would be impossible to return to Paris until the morning, and the poor

child trembled at the thought of her husband's anger. She was too miserable to go to bed, but sat shivering until morning, when she flung herself down and fell asleep, worn out with excitement and misery. When she awoke it was past three o'clock and she sprang up with a cry of consternation. She must have slept nine hours. No one had been near her, but something white on the carpet caught her eye. It was a letter thrust under the door, and before she opened it she knew from whom it came, and her heart sank within her.

A night's reflection had somewhat reassured Monsieur de Maupas. Daphne was English, he reasoned; he had taken her by surprise: she must have time to become reconciled to her position. But that in the end she would yield and accompany him, he never doubted. Why not? She did not love her husband, indeed she openly flouted and mocked him. She had been ready enough to betray his confidence and meet the man who proclaimed himself her lover. That she should seriously wish to draw back now was an absurdity. Monsieur de Maupas had little faith in any woman's virtue, and none in Daphne's. He never supposed it possible that she should feel outraged and

indignant at his cold-blooded proposition. It was, to him, the natural climax, and since he was ready to meet her half-way, it puzzled him that she should, so late in the day, give herself airs and ape a modesty it was out of the question she could really feel. Therefore he wrote an amorous epistle, couched in terms which brought a hot blush to Daphne's cheeks and the smarting tears to her eyes. She would forgive him! They must not quarrel. She should be allowed to make her own terms, and might live where she pleased, and he was her devoted lover.

Daphne set her firm white teeth together and tore this composition into shreds and flung them on the floor. And Raoul de Maupas waited in vain for his answer.

He would not leave the hotel while she was there. It augured well that she had not returned to Paris earlier in the day. He did not know that it was from pure accident that she had not.

And then Daphne, uncertain how to act, longing to return home, yet shrinking from her husband's wrath and just anger, bethought her of Constance, and in her hour of need appealed to her womanly heart. After her telegram was on its way, she grew somewhat comforted. Constance was so reliant, so sure; she would

tell her the whole truth, the shameful story from first to last, and leave herself in her hands.

But there was another night to get through before her sister-in-law could arrive, and it was a very wan, white-faced little girl, the ghost of the blooming Daphne, as she remembered her, who flung herself weeping into Constance's arms.

"You have come! Oh, how glad I am," she cried hysterically.

It was some time before Constance could gather a fair idea of all that had transpired, and her face grew graver as she listened. It would be very hard for Gerald to forgive. That Daphne should have remained two nights in the same hotel as Monsieur de Maupas was against her.

"I could not help it. I have never seen him. Oh, believe me, Constance. I have only opened my door twice, when they brought me something to eat. You will tell Gerald this. It is the truth—indeed, indeed it is."

"Is this man here still?"

"I don't know," sighed Daphne. "What does it matter?"

Constance laid aside her bonnet and cloak and smoothed her hair. "Lie down and rest," she said gently. "Shut your

eyes and don't fret. I shall be back in a short time—with good news, I trust."

"Where are you going?"

"I will tell you when I come back." She kissed Daphne tenderly, and the girl turned the key in the lock again and lay down upon her bed. But she could not rest—her brain felt on fire, and there was a strange buzzing and singing in her ears that amounted to positive pain. When Constance came back she was lying very quiet, and thinking she had fallen asleep she sat down by the bedside to determine what her next move was to be. For Constance had failed in her first attempt. Monsieur de Maupas, with the utmost politeness, absolutely refused what she demanded, a written statement that he had held no communication with Daphne since their arrival at Les Trois Princes, and an unvarnished account of how she had chanced to be in his company.

With many regrets, and bows and smirks, Monsieur de Maupas was firm. Madame had voluntarily come away with him, he said, and if she had changed her mind since, it was a fact to be deplored. As for himself, he should make a little tour. He had long wished to go into Italy, and he would not return until this little unpleasantness had passed over. And

then he opened the door, and there was nothing left but to walk out. Within two hours Monsieur de Maupas was on his way to England. The game was up. He did not break his heart over Daphne's treatment of him ; it affected his temper a little, his appetite not at all. In a word, he accepted the inevitable and did not allow himself to be unduly disturbed. People such as he rarely do. Why should they ?

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE hours wore themselves away and still Daphne slept, and still Constance kept watch by her side. How quiet she was—her face flushed and her little hands hot and burning. Constance was alarmed and tried to rouse her. Daphne opened her eyes and fixed them dully upon her, and then closed them again. Before another nightfall she was tossing and moaning deliriously

“Oh, how thankful I am I came,” Constance said to the doctor, who was hastily summoned. “Poor child, poor child.”

But Daphne was blessed with a good constitution although she was so fragile, and was soon out of danger, but she was very weak and would require the greatest care for a long time to come. And all this time nothing had been heard of Mr. Armitage.

While Daphne lay dangerously ill, Constance dared not leave her, and she would trust to no pen and ink medium. She must see her brother-in-law herself.

“Get well quickly, my child, and leave



me to make your peace with Gerald," she said.

The tears coursed down Daphne's pale cheeks. "He will never forgive me," she sobbed. "I know he never can."

It was six days since Daphne left her home when Constance found herself with a quickly beating heart at Mr. Armitage's house. He was at home, and hearing voices, opened the door of the salon.

"I bring you news of Daphne, Gerald," she said, extending her hand, but he did not offer to take it.

"You know!" he ejaculated. "Have you heard from her then?"

"She has been with me."

"With you? Where, then, has that scoundrel——?"

"Hush—be patient and I will tell you all."

It was a pitiful tale. Gloss it over as carefully as she might, the erring girl had gone woefully astray, and Gerald's face grew hard and rigid.

"Why have I heard nothing for so long? Surely you must have known, Constance, the anxiety and suspense I must be enduring."

And then she told of Daphne's illness and how terribly weak she was still.

"She sent you a message; shall I give it to you?"

"No!" Mr Armitage rose from his chair and began to pace up and down the room. "I thank God she is not the guilty wretch I believed her to be, but by her own confession she is a wicked, treacherous woman, and wife of mine no longer. Let her do as she pleases, and go where she will; she shall never come back here."

"Think what you are saying," pleaded Constance. "If you could only know how penitent she is, and what a lesson she has had. Believe me there is a chance of happiness for you both in the future."

"Life holds nothing for me henceforth."

"Be pitiful—remember she knew so little of the world; she was like a child who plays with fire all unconscious of danger. This man flattered her, made her believe that he was desperately in love with her, and appealed to her vanity, not her heart. When the veil was torn away and she saw him as he was, a vile seducer, she shrank away in horror and loathing, and now—oh, Gerald, it lies in your own hands—the future. You will forgive and take her back?"

"I cannot. Constance, you don't know what you are asking. I loved and trusted her; I left her with my kisses on her lips, and she—she kissed me back, kiss for kiss,

and so, like Judas, betrayed me. It is beyond me to forgive."

"Is your love then dead? Was it so slight, so poor a thing that at the first breath of dishonour it perished?"

His head fell on his hands.

"Shall I tell you what she bade me say, Gerald?"

"No, Constance. The time for pretty speeches and soft words has gone by. My mind is made up. I will never voluntarily see my wife again. She has outraged me beyond the power of man to forgive. I believe in her innocence, so far as actual criminality goes, but I could never trust her again; therefore a life spent side by side would be intolerable for us both."

Constance rose from her chair and crossed the room softly to his side.

"I must give you her message because I promised to do so," she said gently. "After that, if you still wish it, I will go back to her. 'Tell him that I know and see how wrong I have been,' she said, 'and ask him to pardon me for the sake of our unborn child.'"

"What!" He sprang to his feet, and seized Constance's hands in both his own, wrung them hard, and turned away that she might not see the tears that were blistering his cheeks.

Gerald Armitage and his sister-in-law arrived at Amiens late that same evening. Daphne had missed her kind nurse terribly, and was nervously awaiting her sentence. She felt weak and ill, and when the door opened and she saw her husband standing on the threshold, she put out her arms with a little cry of gladness, and fell upon his breast. Constance shut the door softly, and left them together.

“It was worth coming for,” she whispered, as she went slowly down the corridor to her own room; “there is a chance of happiness for them both now, and this terrible lesson will not have been in vain.”

And then, for almost the first time since she left England, she allowed her thoughts to stray to Basil, and a little anxiety stole over her. She had written one brief note to him, explaining her absence somewhat vaguely, and giving him her address at Les Trois Princes, touching lightly on domestic troubles, and fixing an early day for her return home; and to this no answer had come. It was a little strange, too, that Miss Baillie had not written. Probably the morrow would bring letters from both; but as peace and sunshine came back to Daphne and her husband, a dim foreboding of trouble in store for herself took

possession of her, and when two days passed away and still there was silence, she could control herself no longer, and wired to England :

“Is all well? I am anxious.”

But that, too, remained unanswered.

“I must go back ; I am quite sure some thing is wrong,” she said with a trembling lip. “Dear Daphne, do not ask me to linger. I must go.”

The following day Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Armitage returned to Paris, and a later train bore Constance to England.

It was not until long afterwards that Daphne learned what had transpired after her elopement. Her husband had not seen her at the station as it chanced, and hurried home blithe and light-hearted. Then to his surprise he found his wife missing, but beyond a momentary disappointment he attached no importance to it, expecting every moment that she would return. But when the hours passed by and still she was absent, he grew extremely anxious. Upon inquiry he found that she had gone out early in the afternoon, ostensibly to Madame Hortense. Mr. Armitage put on his hat and in a few moments found himself in the presence of that lady.

Madame looked a good deal startled and not a little guilty, and her manner confirmed his suspicions that something was wrong.

“She was here then, you say, and remained how long?”

“Oh, monsieur, I forget—I did not notice. It might be one hour, or two, or more.”

“Well, as she is not here now, she must have gone away some time. Do you know where she went?”

“I, monsieur—how should I know? She told me nothing—not one word. Mon Dieu! why for do you come to me? I know not where Madame is. It is nothing to me. She meet her friend and they go away together. I know no more.”

“Her friend?”

“Mais oui—Madame de Maupas. Was that a crime?”

Hortense was puzzled. Why a husband should object to his wife leaving her rooms with another lady she could not understand. That she must be discreet as to the visits of Monsieur Raoul was quite another matter, but she did not think it necessary to hold her tongue about anything else. Indeed, she believed she was helping Mrs. Armitage by proclaiming the fact of her being with Madame de Maupas and throw-

ing him completely off the scent. But she had supplied the missing link all unwittingly. Within five minutes Mr. Armitage was in Madame de Maupas' presence.

"Where is my wife?" he asked excitedly. "I have come for my wife."

"She is not here. Is she then not at home?"

Félicie looked dismayed. If not, where was she?

"She has been here?"

"Yes." Madame de Maupas acknowledged that she had, but had taken her departure shortly before eight o'clock, and the lady disclaimed any further knowledge of Mrs. Armitage's movements.

"Where is your brother?" angrily demanded Mr. Armitage, fearing he hardly knew what.

"He is not in Paris. He is away on business."

At this intelligence the unhappy man hardly knew whether to be relieved or still more anxious.

"You can tell me nothing then?"

"I regret to say that I cannot."

Madame de Maupas rose to signify that the interview was at an end, for she was a little afraid of this stern man, who looked at her so searchingly and accusingly, and

perhaps her conscience was pricking her a little.

Mr. Armitage passed out on to the stone corridor and began slowly to descend the steps. Waiting for him by the concierge's room was Angèle. He would not have noticed her, but that she slipped forward and laid her hand on his arm.

"I can tell you where your wife is," she said in a low, venomous whisper. "She left this house with Monsieur de Maupas. If she has not returned to her home, she is with him still."

"What grounds have you for making such an assertion? Do you know what you are implying?"

"If you doubt what I tell you, read this," and she thrust into his hand the letter written by Daphne—which she had intercepted. "That was sent to Monsieur Raoul," she said, "and it was not the first, nor the second; you must draw your own conclusions as I have done."

Like a man in a dream, Gerald Armitage staggered into the street. All through the long hours of that night he sat and thought, and brooded, and argued with himself, until his brain reeled and his senses grew dim, and inch by inch the ground was slipping from beneath his feet, and his eyes were slowly opening to the sad and



bitter truth that was staring him in the face.

"I wonder why she hated me so," cried poor Daphne, when her husband told her all this. "She never liked me from the first, but I don't think I ever did her an injury."

No, she had only stolen her lover from her, been guilty of the one unpardonable sin in a woman's eyes. That was all. They talked for hours, Daphne and her husband, she with her hand locked in his, and her bright head pillowed on his shoulder.

"We will have no concealments and no misunderstandings henceforth," said Gerald. "You will be frank and open with me in all things, and I will strive to be patient."

"Oh," cried Daphne, with a sudden gush of penitent tears, "it cuts me to the heart to hear you speak so kindly to me. I, who have acted so ill. I can never, never forgive myself for my wicked folly."

Mr. Armitage gathered the little figure closer to him.

"Love me, my wife," he whispered. "Only learn to love me, dear."

"Oh! I do, I do. I never knew it before. I tried to tell myself that you were harsh and cold, but all the time, deep

down in my heart there was a feeling that I can never have for anyone else, and now I know that it was love."

A tear fell on the small, shapely hand, but Daphne's eyes were bright and clear as she flung her soft arms upward and laid them around his neck.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

FULL of vague misgivings, Constance found herself at her own door. It was early morning, and the household not yet astir. Phœbe, looking very sleepy, with a suspicion of having huddled her clothes on hurriedly, drew back the bolts and admitted her mistress.

“Is all well?” asked Mrs. Armitage, and without pausing for a reply pushed open the door of the dining-room. There, on the mantel-shelf, were her own letters addressed to Miss Baillie—unopened. “Oh, what has happened?” she cried.

The poor lady was both startled and alarmed. “Where is Miss Baillie? Send her to me at once.”

“If you please, ’m, she’s gone. She just packed every blessed thing and took herself off. There isn’t a sign of her nowhere.” And Phœbe looked around as if perchance a limb or an eye might possibly be hidden somewhere about. “Poor little Miss Eva, she fretted sorely, so I took her round to her aunt and she’s been there all the while.”

“Good Heavens! What could have

possessed her to be absent from her post, at such a time? Did she say why she went, Phœbe?" The girl's face grew scarlet, and she rolled the corner of her apron between her finger and thumb nervously.

"Well, you see, ma'am, we none of us knew whether you'd come back here or not, and I suppose that having her living to get, she has to be particular as to where her situations is, and if you please, ma'am, I'm all alone, except my cousin, who've been staying with me, I were that lonesome of a night. Cook, she's gone too."

"Were they all bewitched?" cried Constance, staring blankly into the pink abashed cheeks of the little serving-maid.

"But I couldn't do such a mean thing as to go off, too," continued Phœbe, evidently taking great praise to herself for the sacrifice she was making. "I made up my mind that no matter what you was, I'd just bide till you come home."

"What I was! Kindly explain yourself." Constance felt that she was growing cold and numb. Her heart beat dully, and her senses seemed dazed.

"Well, it ain't a nice thing for me to talk about, but when you went off with Lord Hardstock, we none of us knew—— good lord, she's dead!"

Constance had fallen from her chair in a dead faint. When she came back to life, Phœbe was sobbing wildly, smacking her hands smartly, and had evidently emptied the contents of a pitcher of water upon her, for she was dripping wet. With an effort she pulled herself upright, and presently was able to walk upstairs into her own room. Phœbe waited for her in silence, save for an occasional sob, as quickly stifled.

When the clinging draperies were removed and Constance was beginning to feel more like herself, she said kindly to the girl :

“ My poor Phœbe, you must not remain any longer in the frightful error into which you have fallen. Lord Hardstock—Lord Hardstock accompanied me to Dover the night I left home, because it was late for me to travel alone. I received a telegram which you yourself brought me from a dear friend who required my presence at once, and I had barely time to catch the train. I have been by a sick bed ever since, and his lordship returned to town the same night.”

“ Then you—you didn’t——”

“ Hush, for pity’s sake ! ” Constance held up her hand appealingly. The shameful suspicion must not be put into words. She could not bear it.

“Well I never!” Phœbe drew a long breath, and then once more dissolved into tears. “What a wicked girl cook and me have been,” she sobbed inconsequently, and however shaky the grammar might be, there was no doubt whatever about the regret in Phœbe’s honest heart.

“Go and make me a cup of tea,” said her mistress, longing to be alone.

And Phœbe went, but was terribly disappointed to find that Mrs. Armitage barely put her lips to the cup, and set it down again without drinking it.

“Has anyone called since I have been away?”

“No, ma’am; I think not.”

“No one—not a gentleman?”

“Yes, to be sure—you hadn’t been gone half-an-hour. Miss Baillie, she saw him in the drawing-room. He didn’t call again. I can get his card in a minute.”

“No matter. I know who the gentleman was. Was there no message? Oh, you say Miss Baillie saw him. Have you her address?”

“That I haven’t. We were all in too much of a stew to think of it. She’s never been near the place, ma’am, since, and she looked that bad and ill when she went, she might have been a ghost. Poor thing, she were upset.”

"I think you must all have taken leave of your senses," said Constance, haughtily, as the actual meaning of it all came home to her. "In an hour's time you shall take a note round to Clarges Street. I must see my sister."

And within a very few minutes after receiving the few cold terse lines which Constance despatched to that lady, Mrs. Strangways had tied her bonnet on and was ready for departure.

She entered Constance's room hurriedly, but after Phœbe's description of her mistress's condition, she was considerably taken aback when Mrs. Armitage folded her hands together and refused to shake that of her sister, motioning her to a chair, but standing herself.

"No," she said, haughtily. "If you have believed this vile thing that has been said of me—if you could have found it in you for one single moment to give ear to such abomination, you are sister of mine no longer. Speak, Rebecca."

Mrs. Strangways looked extremely uncomfortable.

"My dear Constance, there is no use in riding the high horse," said she. "You must acknowledge that the whole affair looked strange. You laid aside your widow's weeds and appeared in muslin and

laces. Lord Hardstock was invited to dine with you *tête-à-tête*, and you went away together, leaving not the faintest word of explanation of your so doing. Moreover, there has not been a line from you since to any of us. What were we to think?"

"And you—my sister, who have known me from my babyhood, could so misjudge me! God forgive you, Rebecca."

"I did not believe that—that you had really—I mean, I supposed, of course, that you would return as Lord Hardstock's wife," amended Mrs. Strangways appealingly. Constance's lip curled.

"You did me that scanty justice? Well, perhaps I ought to be grateful to you. Now, after condemning me unheard, have the goodness to listen to my justification of what, after all, however black it might appear, was the most natural thing in the world. To you I may tell the truth, but to others, for the sake of the poor erring girl herself, I must be dumb." And Mrs. Armitage told the tale of Daphne's flight, her appeal to her sister-in-law, her subsequent illness and reconciliation with her husband. As Rebecca listened, a little quiver passed over her face.

"I was wrong," she said, humbly. "But oh, Constance, when the days went



by and you made no sign, I did—I confess I did believe evil of you. It seemed such an extraordinary thing that you should have left your home with Lord Hardstock in the way you did. You will forgive me, sister?”

“Oh yes, I suppose so.” Constance spoke drearily. Her heart felt breaking within her. What had she done to deserve this ignominy?

“You have heard nothing of Miss Baillie? She was in a dreadful hurry to leave the house, where, at least, she invariably met with kindness and consideration, but, as Phœbe reminded me, she had her character to consider.”

“No, not a word. She never so much as bade good-bye to Eva, who has been happy enough with me and is a more docile child than she used to be.”

And then Constance broke down. She laid her head on the cushions of the sofa and wept bitterly.

“Let her come to me,” she said. “My darling—the one thing on earth I have to love and cherish! She at least will not wrong and misjudge her mother.”

“Constance, you must make allowances,” pleaded Mrs. Strangways. “We none of us wanted to think ill of you, and a few words would have prevented it all.”

But Constance wept on. There was a horrible dread upon her, which she could not give voice to—a foreboding of what was yet to come.

“What became of Lord Hardstock after you left, I wonder?” asked Rebecca. “He has not been heard of at the Albany. Mr. Strangways went to make enquiries.”

“I don’t know; he made no mention of his movements to me, and I was not in the very least degree interested in them. Oh, Rebecca, you must have been mad to dream for an instant that I had left my home with him!—a man whom I loathe and despise—a man whom, as you well know, I have refused to marry. The thing carried denial on the face of it.”

Poor Mrs. Strangways could only miserably reiterate her former plea that “it looked very strange.”

That night Constance fairly cried herself to sleep, with Eva’s soft little body pressed closely in her arms. Never had she felt so desolate, so sad. The days wore away, and Miss Baillie made no sign, nor was there any news of Lord Hardstock.

Constance both looked and felt ill. Her limbs ached, and she seemed weighed down, dragging herself about with difficulty; her head throbbed and she could not sleep. Rebecca came every day to see

her, and made no secret of her uneasiness, but Constance declared that nothing was amiss.

"It has been an awful shock to her," said Rebecca to her husband; "really, she seems to feel it more than that disgraceful affair with Cyril."

"Perhaps there is more yet to learn," remarked Mr. Strangways, fondling his chin and looking away over his wife's head.

"Now that is so like you; you do love to be vague. What more can there be to know?"

Mrs. Strangways spoke irritably. Had she not sifted every vestige of detail, and was it very likely that anything of importance could have escaped her? Rebecca, as we know, prided herself on being able to see as far through a brick wall as anybody. But this time she met with a surprise.

"If Constance was not expecting Lord Hardstock to dinner that night, who was to be her visitor?" asked Mr. Strangways, quietly.

"Upon my word I never thought about it. Who could it have been?"

"She did not tell you, I presume?"

"No, I am sure she did not, or I should have recollected it. Constance has so few visitors."

“Your sister had exchanged her mourning dress for white, left off her widow’s cap, in a word, proclaimed to her household that she was a sorrowing widow no longer,” continued Mr. Strangways in a level voice. “Someone was invited to a *tête-à-tête* repast, which she was prevented from enjoying by the arrival of Daphne’s inopportune telegram. To my mind the whole thing lies in a nutshell. In this case it is *cherchez l’homme* and you will have the key to Constance’s ill-health and moody depression of spirits.”

“I should not wonder if you are right,” murmured Rebecca, and after that she sat lost in thought for a long time. Who could Constance’s visitor have been? And at length her curiosity got so much the upper hand of her, that a day or two later she put the question point blank to her sister. They were sitting in Constance’s pretty drawing-room together, and Eva was playing on the hearthrug with some new bricks, building a house determined to fall into ruins as her mother’s *château en Espagne* had done.

Constance did not colour nor did the hand that held the needle tremble in the slightest. She lifted her head and met her sister’s gaze unflinchingly and with a steady stare that somewhat nonplussed Rebecca.

"I prefer not to say," she remarked, quietly.

"In Heaven's name, why not?" Rebecca was a very daughter of Eve, and resolved not to be baffled. Constance had no right to keep secrets from her, secrets of such a nature. She felt unreasonably vexed and pressed the point persistently.

"My dear Rebecca, I object to discuss the subject."

"Well," cried Mrs. Strangways, fairly losing her temper, "if you choose to remain silent, you must abide by any conclusion we may come to regarding the matter, and have only yourself to thank if we are wrong."

A wan smile flitted across Constance's face. "That would be dreadful—I fear I should never survive it," she said, and suddenly astonished her sister by laughing aloud, a harsh discordant laugh that had no music in it.

"For the future I walk my own way," she added; "since rectitude of conduct and a perfectly blameless life count for nothing in the estimation of my friends, they can now take me as they find me, and whether they praise or blame, it will be all one to me, for I am absolutely indifferent in the matter."

And Mrs. Strangways went back to Clarges Street, her curiosity unsatisfied, but

more assured than ever that her husband's words had been solid chunks of wisdom, and that there was a good and sufficient reason for Constance's reticence.

## CHAPTER XL.

MANY men can hardly realise how difficult it is for a woman to take the initiative. If Basil St. Quentin had left but a written line, although it had been but of the bitterest reproach, it would have been easier to meet and fight than utter silence.

That he, too, believed her guilty, Constance was sadly forced into perceiving, and the knowledge almost broke her heart. True, there was nothing between them—there were no vows on either side to bind, and yet he had asked her to be his wife and she had not said him nay. He must have known that she loved him. Was he still in London, or had he returned to Paris? Racked with doubts and misery, the poor soul penned a note to Daphne, in which she asked if she had heard anything of St. Quentin, and when the reply lay before her, her hand trembled so much that she could hardly open it. Alas! Her worst misgivings were realised. The man she loved had gone to South America.

“No one knows why,” wrote Daphne.  
“He sent a message for all his belongings,

gave up his rooms, and started there and then. But he always was an erratic fellow."

The letter fell on Constance's lap, and bitter tears forced themselves to her eyes. So this was the end, and the leaf might be doubled down and turned over. Life looked very grey and sad to the disappointed woman.

Two months dragged themselves away, and then Lord Hardstock re-appeared on the scene. He strolled leisurely into Mrs. Strangways' drawing-room, as if it were but yesterday since he was last there, and Rebecca stared at him, as if he were a ghost.

"You?" she cried. "Where under the sun have you been?"

I wonder how often we speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? Very rarely, I imagine. At all events, his lordship had not the faintest intention of enlightening Mrs. Strangways as to his reason for remaining *perdu* and leaving home for so long, and therefore replied with an airy pretence of nothing unusual, which in no way deceived that lady.

"I owe you a thousand apologies," he said. "I expect to find I am in disgrace



with all my friends, but I am a bad hand at letter writing, as you well know. I have been at Greystone with two or three fellows."

"For all this time?" asked Mrs. Strangways, severely, for she did not in the very least believe this pleasing little fiction.

"Well, not the whole of the time since you and I met, certainly. You remember, I dare say, that I had the pleasure of accompanying your sister part of the way on her journey to Amiens. On my return I met an old chum, who asked me to join him on a walking tour, which I did. We had beastly weather, and the whole thing was a fiasco. Never was so vexed with myself in my life. My friend wouldn't turn back, and I could hardly leave him alone, so we managed to get through three weeks of utter martyrdom, and look as if it were the most delightful thing in the world to get wet through to the skin, and, at least in every twenty-four hours, with every bone in our bodies aching. But it came to an end, as everything must do, sooner or later, according to the law of compensation, which, if it cuts short our joys, mercifully puts us out of our troubles as well, and then I went down to Greystone to recruit, and—well—here I am."

Mrs. Strangways was puzzled and remained silent.

"Now, tell me all the news," cried his lordship. "In the first place, how is Mrs. Armitage?"

"Not well, I am sorry to say, but she has had enough worry to account for it. That ungrateful girl, Miss Baillie, ran away the very day after she went to Paris."

"You surprise me! Ran away! When did she go? It is strange I have heard nothing. Really I begin to think there must be something a little wrong here," he continued, tapping his forehead significantly. "You remember how oddly she acted once before?"

"I do. It is a great pity that you should have recommended a young person of whom you knew so little to my sister, Lord Hardstock."

"You cannot regret it, my dear madam, more than I do. But what little acquaintance I had with the girl warranted my believing her to be in every way suited to Mrs. Armitage. She has not behaved well, certainly."

"We will not discuss the matter. It is not a pleasant subject. I do not suppose we shall ever hear of her again."

Devoutly did his lordship echo that wish. On the following day he called at Kensing-

ton, but, a good deal to his chagrin, he was not admitted.

"Mrs. Armitage is seeing no one to-day," he was informed, and although he scribbled a hasty line beneath his name and sent it up to Constance in blissful confidence that the rule would be relaxed for him, he had to go away disappointed.

"Mrs. Armitage regretted that she was unable to see Lord Hardstock."

"Is she ill, Phœbe?"

Phœbe cast down her eyes demurely and answered that she did not know. And, inwardly fuming, his lordship went away. At the end of the week he called again, but Constance was not visible. Two days later, he made the attempt once more, and this time it began dimly to dawn upon him that Mrs. Armitage did not desire to see him, and the suspicion nettled and wounded him. The moment he reached his chambers, he sat down and wrote a note, in which he expressed his surprise at the reception he had met, and asked for an explanation.

By the next evening's post he got it.

"Scandal had coupled their names together in a most unpleasant way," Mrs. Armitage wrote, "and she was therefore reluctantly obliged to ask Lord Hard-

stock to discontinue his visits to Kensington."

Nothing could have been colder or more terse.

"She suspects." And then he uttered words not fit for ears polite, and by-and-by he betook himself to Mrs. Strangways for sympathy.

"I am not surprised that Constance has turned the cold shoulder upon you," said that lady, "although in my own opinion she is acting in the most absurd manner. But still, considering everything——"

"I am entirely in the dark, remember Will you be so good as to enlighten me as to what I am accused of, and how through my instrumentality Mrs. Armitage's good name has suffered?"

And Mrs. Strangways briefly narrated the actual facts. Lord Hardstock appeared deeply concerned. "It is abominable that such a report should have been circulated," he said, "but don't you think it is a little hard that the blame should rest upon me, and that I, wholly innocent as I am, must pay the penalty?"

"I do," replied Rebecca, pulling at her thread so angrily that it broke; "but it is not with me you have to deal, and Constance is made of different stuff altogether.

If she says she will not permit your visits, you may rest assured that she will keep her word, for she is as obstinate as a mule when she gets a fancy into her head."

"But a word or two from you," insinuated Lord Hardstock.

"I will do my best; but I tell you candidly that I have not the faintest hope of succeeding. Constance is as hard as granite with me, as with the rest of the world, and as cold as steel. Why do you love her?" she asked, suddenly raising her eyes and looking full into his face. "I confess I cannot understand it. She never has cared and never will care for you. She is absolutely incapable of appreciating the sacrifices you would make for her. She is not a pretty woman—not exceedingly pretty; she is not——"

"She is the most tantalising and vexatious woman God ever created. I love her for herself, because she is Constance. I can say no more. I love her because she is pure and good, and miles above any other woman I ever met." Lord Hardstock seized his hat, and a minute later had hailed a hansom and was driving rapidly away.

And where was Emily—erring, broken-hearted Emily? Her first impulse was to go away, where she would not be reminded

of her lover's falseness and treachery ; so she packed her boxes, and as one in a dream left the home where she had spent so many quiet, peaceful, if not actually happy months. Her life seemed to have come to a sudden stop, and it was difficult to take up the broken threads and weave them anew.

She had been tricked, hoodwinked, and used as a tool to further Lord Hardstock's vile schemes. She wept and gnashed her teeth, and beat the air with her fists in impotent rage. Emily was eminently practical, and her grief and anger did not prevent her counting over the contents of her purse to find how large a sum stood between her and starvation.

"I can't work, the energy has gone out of me," she cried, drearily. And for days she sat in a sort of stupor, hardly moving ; eating when driven to it by sheer hunger ; sleeping when fatigue weighed down her eyelids—dazed, stupefied. And then she roused herself. She still had her voice, and although she was out of practice, that could soon be remedied. She hired a piano and set to work at once, and before a month had passed over her head, she had secured an engagement at a pound a week.

But it was dreary work. Ambition was dead within her. When they praised the

rich, sweet tones, she smiled and shrugged her shoulders. What did it matter? She would die if she did not work; her voice was a means of support; therefore she sang. She cared nothing at all whether the talent she possessed was appreciated or no. She was simply a machine to grind out work adequate to the sum paid to her. Her beauty was going fast. Her cheeks were hollow, and lines had traced themselves upon her face, and her brow was wrinkled. She would not allow her thoughts to dwell upon the past, and shrank from anything that might bring it to her memory, forcing herself to live only in the present—the loveless, joyless, awful present. Truly it was *Death in Life*.

“And I may live fifty years longer. Oh, my God, have pity upon me!” cried the wretched girl.

One night when her work was done, and she was starting for what she called “home,” it began to rain, big drops plashing on the pavement. “I cannot afford to be ill,” reflected Emily, and she hailed a passing omnibus and got in. At the further end sat Dr. Dale. She would have retreated, but he was too quick for her. He seized her hand joyfully.

“What a lucky accident!” he cried, his face aglow with surprise and pleasure.

Well, she might as well sit down. Fate was too strong for her. She sank into a place next to his and ceased to struggle. By-and-by she had no longer the wish to do so ; the kindly voice, the gentle words full of interest in her, pregnant with feeling and sympathy—they were very grateful. She turned and involuntarily looked up at him. How strong, how manly, how handsome he was ! And yet with all the perversity of her sex, she had bestowed not so much as a grain of affection upon him. Almost she could find it in her to be a little pitiful, with an odd sort of self-pity.

“Where are you living ?” he asked.

She told him, although she had made up her mind that she would not do so.

“And you are happy ?”

“No,” she answered, with a little quivering sigh. “I can never be happy again.”

He passed over the despairing words as if he had not heard them, but they had sunk deep down into his heart. “Poor, friendless girl,” he was thinking, as she held out her hand in farewell.

“This is my corner—I get down here. Good-bye.”

“I am coming with you.” And again she made no protest. In silence they



walked, side by side, until she reached her own door.

“My secret is safe with you. You will give my address to no one?”

“You have my word. Good-night, child.”

“Good-night. God bless you.”

There was something like a tear in Emily's eye as she ascended the rickety little staircase to her own room. But on the morrow she took herself to task. How imprudent she had been. What could have possessed her to reveal her whereabouts? She could no longer count on seclusion and privacy. True, she might leave the neighbourhood. But she did not do so. And when, each night, as she turned the corner of the street, she walked leisurely and slowly to her own door, perhaps there was a little disappointment in her heart.

And yet it could not have been Dr. Dale she half hoped to see, because she had herself extracted a promise that he would not annoy her in any way.

## CHAPTER XLI.

It was a pitiless night, the rain falling in torrents, and a suspicion of thunder in the air. Dr. Dale congratulated himself that his rounds were over, and that there was no urgent call necessitating his leaving his cosy study again that evening.

He had a pile of books before him, but he had scarcely turned a page of the one that lay open upon his knee, for his thoughts had strayed to Emily Baillie—mysterious, bewitching Emily.

If she could but have known the amount of self-control he was obliged to call to his aid to keep out of her vicinity, but he had given his promise, and a promise was a sacred thing in the young doctor's eyes. He had felt sorely tempted to write to her, to ask her plans, to beg her to consider him her friend, and to apply to him if he could be of the smallest assistance to her, but he hesitated. He felt diffident about forcing himself upon her, and she had been at no pains to hide from him her annoyance at their last meeting.

Oh! but that was at the first moment. Afterwards she had been like her old self,

her most gracious and pleasing self. It was odd what an influence he exerted over her, and now, almost unconsciously, and most positively unwillingly, she yielded to him until her thoughts became his thoughts, and her individuality, as it were, became merged in his own. Dr. Dale rarely trusted himself to dwell on the subject that had so fascinated him a while ago—mesmerism and the occult influence individuals exercise over each other: the human will—intangible, subtle, yet so powerful that it could override and master a weaker one—an interesting study, perplexing and most wonderful.

Dr. Dale rose, and drew a couple of volumes towards him, opening them in a half abashed and hesitating fashion—half afraid, conscious that intermeddling might be dangerous, and yet unable to resist the temptation. Page after page he turned, and the hours ticked themselves away, and still he read on.

The rain fell more heavily, and a dull rumbling proclaimed that the storm was at hand.

“It is incredible,” he said at last. “What might not science accomplish, strengthened by so powerful an ally? And yet we are as children in the dark, scarce daring to take a step forward lest——”

A loud ring at the bell caused him to spring to his feet. He crossed the little hall and flung open the door.

A woman pushed past him into the room beyond, her cloak streaming with water. It was Emily Baillie. At this hour!

Dr. Dale shot the bolts in the outer door and followed her mechanically. Neither of them had uttered a word. Emily tore off the veil from her face, and then he saw how pale she was. She was evidently ill and in need of his services? He came to her side, unfastened her heavy cloak, and shook it carefully, and then poured a few drops of sal-volatile into a glass and held it towards her. But she motioned it aside.

"You must think me mad to come here at such a time," she said, with a feeble attempt at a smile, "but I could not spend another night of torture such as I have been living through the past week, and I thought you would tell me what to do." She looked up at him wistfully.

"You cannot sleep?"

She shook her head. "I lay and toss, and turn, and think. Oh, God, I am thinking, thinking until my brain reels and my senses fail me, and if for a moment I lose myself, the horror of my dreams wakens me. It is killing me. Give me something for pity's sake; surely there is

some drug powerful enough to deaden feeling and—memory.”

There was a mist before Dr. Dale’s eyes, and a huskiness in the voice that answered her.

“There is no medicine potent enough to do what you want, my poor child. I know of none.”

The girl stretched her hands towards him. She was not acting. For once in her life she had forgotten self—she put out her poor shaking hands.

“Then Heaven help me,” she murmured, “for I can bear no more.”

Feebly she groped for her bonnet, found it, and would have put it on and gone away, but he pushed her back in her chair.

“Rest,” he said imperatively “Lie back there and I will fetch you something that will ease you for the moment.” He came back with a decanter of wine and a couple of glasses.

“There,” he said, cheerily, “you will drink some of this to please me, and you will feel ever so much better by-and-by.”

She let him pour some out and drank it, when he saw the colour was ebbing back to her lips and cheeks, he drew his chair close to hers and took both her hands into his firm clasp.

“Emily,” he said, “listen to me, dear.

You are unstrung, your nerves are all to pieces, you want care and good nursing, or I shudder to think what may be in store for you. Will you give yourself to me, will you let me make you my wife? My life shall be spent in striving to win your love. Darling, you shall never regret it."

She was looking up at him with widely open eyes.

"You forget," she said brokenly "There has been—someone else."

"I forget nothing. I know that you have cared for a man who has not honour enough to——"

"Hush! for pity's sake!" She had wrenched her fingers from his clasp and flung them before her face. "You do not know what you ask, nor what I am. If you knew you would turn from me in horror and loathing. I——" She held herself a little apart, speaking with difficulty, her eyes seeking his nervously. "I——" Her voice faltered and broke.

"Speak, Emily. I bid you speak. Fear nothing."

Great beads of perspiration stood on the doctor's brow. Again he laid his hands on hers, and could feel her quiver as he did so. The words came haltingly from her lips, disconnectedly often, a phrase broken or unintelligible, but she obeyed,

and the pitiful story of a woman's frailty and a woman's shame was told, and then with a cry of despair, she tossed her head.

"I love him still," she cried. "I could creep to his feet and die there content."

"Do you love him—the man who has destroyed your life for his own selfish pleasure? Emily, rise above this infatuation. There are depths still untouched, undreamed of, in your nature; your primary instincts were pure, good. Throw off this thrall. Put this man out of your heart and life for ever. You can do it—will you?"

In the silence that followed Dr. Dale could hear the quick throbbing of his heart; but Emily stood white and still.

"You mean——?" she said at last, all unbelievably.

"I mean that what you have confessed to me has in no sense lessened my love for you. I will marry you, Emily, and what is more, I will trust you for all the time to come." And he drew her into his arms.

For a second she lay there, passive, mute; then she raised her hand to her head.

"It is coming back again—the pain, and the confusion," she said. "Oh, make me rest—you can, and you only."

She pressed her hand upon her brow

and he could feel the quick pulses beating and hammering. With all his force, with his whole heart and soul, he willed that she should sink into a dreamless sleep. Her eyelids quivered and fell, the muscles relaxed, she lay heavily back in his arms—at rest.

And then Dr. Dale lifted her and laid her on a sofa at the farther end of the room. It was fitted into a sort of recess, with curtains reaching down to the ground and completely shutting out from view the rest of the room.

And then the storm broke in all its fury. Peals of thunder, followed by lurid gleams of lightning.

“It will not wake her here, and she will be in the dark, which is better,” he mused, as he dragged the curtains across and went back to his chair.

An hour went by, and still the thunder pealed. The doctor opened the window and let in the cool, sweet, rain-laden air. Faugh! It was stifling in here. How quietly she slept—poor Emily! He rose, and drew back the crimson draperies. She might almost have been dead, so motionless, so white.

He bent over her. Her breath came softly, evenly, between the parted lips. Not all the artillery of heaven had power



to arouse her. Her bosom rose and fell beneath the thin gauze that covered it, and her beautifully-moulded limbs were tossed wantonly apart, the thin stuff of which her gown was made allowing the perfect outlines to be seen. The blood rushed to Dr. Dale's face. He caught up a rug and laid it about her, pressing his lips to the white, veined hand that lay palm uppermost. He dared not trust himself to watch her.

How lovely she was! As he thought of the story she had told, and how she had been the caprice of a moment, flung aside when wearied of, he clenched his hand angrily.

"And she loves him still, poor girl! and would follow his beckoning finger if it led to her own destruction. Am I man enough to yield her up to him? Could he be forced into doing her a tardy justice? She has no love for me, and it would be hard to bear if, in the years to come, she grew no nearer to me—if her thoughts were still turned regretfully towards him!"

Full two hours passed away, and Dr. Dale still sat with his head resting on his hand, musing. And then he rose, pale and stern.

"For her sake," he murmured, and with a quick, firm step crossed the room and

drew aside the curtains. The sleeping girl had not stirred. It was eleven o'clock when she rang the bell, and it was now on the stroke of three. Loth though he felt to rouse her, it must be done.

Janet, it was true, was accustomed to all sorts of vagaries on the part of her brother, but she happened to know to-night that he had not been sent for, and, if perchance she was restless, as well she might be after such a storm, it was more than likely that she would find out that he had not yet come upstairs. So, all unwillingly, he put his hand upon Emily's arm.

"Wake up!" he cried, but she did not stir.

He blew sharply upon the closed eyelids, they were fast closed. He even shook her and raised her head from the pillows, but it fell back again.

"She must have her sleep out, I suppose," he thought, uneasily. "If she has had several restless nights she will be worn out with fatigue, but it is awkward."

Yes, it was extremely awkward.

From time to time he tried to rouse her, but with no result whatever, and the time stole away until daylight crept through the windows, and the doctor extinguished his lamp.

Morning had come, and still Emily slept tranquilly on.

Dr. Dale had not closed his eyes all night. He was far too anxious, but he began to feel the want of sleep. He poured some cold water into a basin and dipped his head into it and felt somewhat refreshed. Then he flicked a wet corner of the towel into the face of the sleeping girl, but there was not so much as a movement of the eyelids in response. At nine o'clock the household was astir. The page boy began shaking the mats out of the side door, whistling to himself. Those bars of "Annie Rooney" nearly drove his master distracted. Twenty times he was on the point of calling out to him to cease, but forebore. At last Henry went indoors and there was a lull.

Dr. Dale was anxious to disarrange his bedroom somewhat, so that it might present an air of having been occupied, and presently taking heart of grace, and profoundly hoping that Miss Baillie would not choose the identical moment to awaken when he was absent, he stole forth, carefully locking the door behind him. Up the stairs stealthily—at the top he was confronted by his sister.

"Have you been out, Vivian?" she asked.

“Yes—no—that is to say——

Janet looked surprised, as well she might. It was not her brother's wont to give evasive answers, and he had a perfect right to please himself in all things.

“Your bed has not been slept in,” she remarked, “so I supposed you had been sent for.”

“The fact is, my dear Janet, I stayed up reading, and I actually fell asleep in the arm-chair. A frightful confession to make, is it not?”

His sister laughed and went downstairs without giving it another thought. As soon as it was possible the doctor returned to his sanctum, where Henry brought his breakfast, for he felt it would be impossible to sit down with Janet.

And still Emily slept on. What in the world was he to do? He had a busy day before him, and many patients to see. It was out of the question that he could remain at home, and equally impossible to leave the sleeping beauty locked up. Should he take Janet into his confidence? No. He dismissed the notion. His sister was a bit of a prude. She would think it so odd that Miss Baillie should have come there at all; she had never liked the girl, had made no secret of her suspicions con-

cerning her. He could not tell her. She would not believe him.

"Upon my word I don't know what to do," he said. It was now ten o'clock, and he ought to be off. A few minutes later the brougham came to the door.

"Henry," said Dr. Dale, "send Coates back—I shall not want him until later."

The page boy went out with his message, and a minute or two later Janet knocked at his door.

"Are you not going to use the brougham?" said she, astonishment eligibly written on her face.

"No, I have to wait to see a patient whom I am momentarily expecting," returned the doctor.

But he was telling a lie, and his sister, who knew him so well, could see as much.

## CHAPTER XLII.

Now when Dr. Dale did not use his brougham his sister always took possession of it, but for once she departed from her accustomed rule.

She did not care to go out, she told herself, unwilling to acknowledge that a feeling of curiosity kept her within doors. More and more astonished was Janet when one o'clock came and her brother had not left his surgery. What would his patients think? Twenty of them at least must have been expecting him. Was he ill? Janet flung her work aside and went to the surgery. The door was locked. She rapped sharply. A voice from within answered:

“What do you want?”

“Are you not well, Vivian? Let me in.”

“I am perfectly well, but I am very busy. Pray leave me in peace.”

But Janet did not go. She lingered on the threshold until she had satisfied herself that her brother was alone. Not a sound reached her ear save the quick turning of the pages of a book, and at length she

returned to her own room, sorely puzzled. Truly Dr. Dale was on the horns of a dilemma.

Emily still slept peacefully on, and it might have been the sleep of the dead for all sign she gave of life or movement. He blew upon her face, raised her eyelids, lifted her from her recumbent position and placed her on a chair, but all efforts to awaken her were useless. At two o'clock he had a patient to visit whom it would be fatal to disappoint, so go he must.

Dr. Dale groaned heavily. How he cursed his insane folly in playing with edged tools. Supposing that she never woke up? A cold shiver ran down the doctor's spine and he thrust his fingers through his hair distractedly. Then he hastily scribbled a few lines to meet the girl's eye if she should awaken during his absence, drew the curtains closely over the recess and locked the door after him. When Janet heard the sharp click of the hall door, she flew to the window. Yes, it was her brother, hurrying along at the top of his speed.

He had gone then without luncheon. It was all very perplexing. Janet picked at the wing of a chicken, drank a glass of claret, and, like Bluebeard's wife, determined to trespass on forbidden ground.

She had never once been refused admittance to her brother's sanctum, although as a matter of fact she never wished to go there. It had no charms for her, with its rows of bottles and its cases of shining instruments. It had never occurred to Dr. Dale that his sister might have a twin key to the one that reposed snugly in his waistcoat pocket, but Janet found one on her bunch that fitted, and the lock turned easily. The first thing she saw was the folded note in the middle of the table, addressed to Miss Baillie.

"Then it was she for whom he was waiting," cried Janet, with lips tightly compressed, and would have turned and left the room forthwith, irritated and sore, but something on the floor caught her eye, caught and rivetted it, and that something was long and soft and of a pearly grey—in a word it was a woman's glove. Janet pounced upon it eagerly.

"She has been here! How could I miss seeing her," she wondered. She straightened out the offending tell-tale and laid it down by the note. Why, if she had so lately left him, had her brother written to her?

Janet turned the folded paper over in her hands and, in so doing, unintentionally saw a word or two. And honour was



flung to the winds; she remembered nothing but that the key of the mystery was before her, tore it open and devoured its contents.

“Do not be alarmed at finding yourself alone,” it said. “I shall return as quickly as possible, and on no account attempt to leave the house until I have seen you again.”

Then she was here still! Janet held her breath and looked furtively round. Not a living soul was in sight. What could it mean? Ah! With a sudden movement she flew across the floor and parted the curtains that shaded the recess.

There lay Emily Baillie — asleep. Astonishment rooted Janet to the spot. Literally she was incapable of movement. She stood and gazed, and the unconscious girl slept peacefully on.

When Janet found herself in her own room once more, like Bluebeard’s wife again, she regretted the miserable curiosity that had brought this shameful secret to her knowledge.

“I suppose she has been here all night,” she reflected, with flaming cheeks. “It is disgraceful, and I would never have believed it of Vivian.”

She recalled his confusion and the hesitation with which he spoke when she had met him on the stairs before breakfast that morning. She understood it now, and was more incensed than she had ever been in her life.

Meanwhile, Dr. Dale, in happy ignorance of what had transpired at home, had visited the choleric old gentleman who would assuredly have dismissed him without the faintest scruple, had he not paid his accustomed visit at the hour it suited his convenience to be waited upon, and was standing on the mat preparatory to taking his departure, when a door on his left opened and a man came out, crossed the hall, and as he did so caught sight of Dr. Dale.

It was Lord Hardstock. The blood rushed to the doctor's face. In two seconds he had come to a determination. He stepped forward and laid his hand on the other's arm.

"May I have a word with you?"

"Twenty if you like—I am quite at your service."

The men walked away side by side. Just at first it was not easy to begin his tale, but the ice once broken, the words came glibly. Dr. Dale told how the woman Lord Hardstock had flung into the

gutter had come to him for help and advice, and how her sad story was known to him.

"I have no right to dictate to you," he said, in conclusion. "In such cases each man must judge for himself, and frame his actions according to his own code of honour, but if you could have seen and heard the poor girl as I saw her, bowed down to the very earth with shame and misery, I cannot but think that one course alone would commend itself to you."

"And that?"

"Marriage, and what reparation love and devotion can bring."

Lord Hardstock was silent for a space, then, looking curiously into his companion's face :

"A little bird had whispered to me," said he, "that Dr. Dale was not indifferent to the charms of the lady in question."

"It is true. I am not ashamed to confess it. I love Emily Baillie so well that I bury my own feelings out of sight and ask the man she loves to do her the only justice in his power."

"And you think she would be happy as my wife, knowing as she must certainly do that I offered her marriage solely from a sense of the injury I had done her?"

"I do think so. Hers is a peculiar disposition—sensitive to a degree; highly emotional. You are to her the one man in the world, and she would be happier with you than with one who would undoubtedly treat her better."

"You are honest at all events."

"I am too anxious for her welfare to pick and choose my words." The young man's voice shook.

"What is her address? Where is she staying?"

Dr Dale laughed.

"That is the oddest part of the business. She is in my house, where she has been since eleven o'clock last night — unconscious." And he briefly narrated the facts as we know them.

"Good Lord, man — she may die!" Lord Hardstock was genuinely startled. "I have seen something of mesmerism in my time, and have dabbled in it myself in my younger days, and I know quite enough to be aware that if you are unable to awaken her, you ought at once to get assistance. There is Crawley," naming one of the first mesmerists of the day. "The only thing to be done is to put the case before him at once."

With a sinking heart the doctor agreed, and the two men, drawn together by a

vague and horrible dread, jumped into a hansom and were rapidly driven to Harley Street. Here they found Mr. Crawley at home, and within a quarter of an hour they had all three started for West Kensington.

“It is then seventeen hours since the young lady succumbed to the influence?” questioned the great man. “Have there been any twitchings of the eyelids, or convulsions of the body?”

“None whatever. She lies like a child, and a happy child, quietly sleeping, a half smile upon her face.”

“Humph!” Not another word did the Professor speak until they reached the surgery door, where Dr. Dale produced his latch-key and they entered noiselessly, so noiselessly that Janet on the floor above heard nothing.

Emily lay precisely in the same position as when he had left her, but the doctor fancied that there was a warmer tint upon her face. He took her hand, but it fell limp and nerveless from his hold. Professor Crawley thrust him aside with scant ceremony, and began making rapid passes over the recumbent form. The veins in his forehead stood out like a whipcord; he worked like one possessed, but it was of no avail.

Then he beckoned to Dr. Dale and showed him how to place his arms lengthwise along the arms of the subject, and breathe softly upon her. "Speak to her—call her by name."

"Emily! Emily!"

A quiver passed over the upturned face, another, a smile, and then :

"I am coming, Rupert!" But her voice was so faint, so weak that it only reached the ears of the man who would freely have given his life for her. As if he had been stung, he shrank back. Still with her eyes closed, the girl pulled herself upright, and tried to make a few tottering steps. It was towards Lord Hardstock she turned, and, obeying an imperative gesture from Crawley, his lordship put out his hand and drew her closely to him. With a sigh she laid her head like a tired child upon his breast.

"She will do now. Be careful that she is not disturbed or agitated in any way, and, sir, if you will accept my advice, be chary how you use the gifts you undoubtedly possess, for mesmerism, though the most abject of slaves, is apt at times to be a hard master."

Dr. Dale bowed silently. It was not likely that to his dying day he would forget the terrible lesson he had learned.

Whispering a few words to Lord Hardstock, Dr. Dale closed the surgery door upon him and went upstairs to the dining-room. He was worn out, physically and mentally. His sleepless night, and the terrible excitement he had gone through, had left him weak and unnerved; he was beginning to be conscious, too, that he had breakfasted but lightly and had eaten nothing since. Janet sat stiff and stern in her accustomed seat near the window. Her brother walked up to the sideboard and poured out a tumbler half-full of sherry, and drank it off at a draught, and then he flung himself heavily on the sofa, with a sigh.

"Would you like your luncheon now, Vivian?"

"Yes: I am hungry, and dead tired."

"I am not surprised," returned his sister, frigidly, as she rang the bell.

The doctor made a hearty meal, during which Janet never opened her lips, for which her brother was profoundly thankful; but just as he was about to leave the room she rose from her chair and faced him.

"No," she said with quite a tragic air. "You will not leave me, Vivian, until you inform me who the female is you have secreted in your surgery, and for what purpose she is here."

“My dear Janet, what do you mean?”

“Precisely what I say. Unless you give me a full and sufficient reason for certain facts that have come to my knowledge, I leave your roof at once and for ever. You seem to forget that I am a virtuous woman, and as such should be respected.”

“By Jove, you can go as soon as you like,” cried Dr. Dale, now fully as angry as his sister. “You may be everything that is pure and chaste, but upon my soul you are the biggest fool that ever wore petticoats.”

And so saying the doctor went out and closed the door noisily after him, and Janet fell back in her chair, white and quivering with passion, but too wrathful to shed a single tear.

“What I have seen with my own eyes I must believe,” she said to herself, but she forgot that “things are not what they seem,” and that it is possible for actions that at the first blush appear to be extremely doubtful to stand triumphantly the scathing light of day.



## CHAPTER XLIII.

LORD HARDSTOCK was not grateful for the tact with which his host had left him *tête-à-tête* with his whilom love. On the contrary, he felt awkward and embarrassed, and wholly at a loss for words. Emily lay back among her cushions white and still, and, for full ten minutes after the doctor's steps were heard overhead, silence reigned unbroken.

At last Lord Hardstock spoke in quick, jerky tones which marked his extreme uneasiness.

"A pretty business this," he said, testily, "a nice disgraceful thing to have my name mixed up with, upon my word."

Emily made no response.

"I shall not say what I think about it now," continued his lordship, "but when you are yourself again and in a fit condition to listen to a little plain talk, there will be a terrible reckoning between us."

"Stop!" Emily lifted her hand imperiously. "You have forfeited all right to call me to account. Neither now nor at

any other time will I humble myself to listen to you. You broke the last tie between us when you left me for another woman."

Her eyes were ablaze and she was quivering with passion. When he would have laid his hand soothingly upon hers, she flung it contemptuously aside. What would have irritated most men, curiously enough, attracted Lord Hardstock. He liked a woman to have a spice of the devil in her, and Emily was magnificent in her rage and contempt.

Well, he would make amends. The girl had her good points. She suited him, her nature was akin to his own, he admired her, and he became conscious that she was necessary to his comfort. He did not want to lose her. It would be pleasant to bury the hatchet and be at peace.

"Come now," he said, cajolingly, "I will confess that that little romance as to an elopement with Mrs. Armitage was all moonshine. You had yourself to thank for it. I was sick to death of your jealousy and reproaches."

The girl's large eyes were fixed upon him with an expression which it was difficult to read.

"It was a lie," she said, slowly, and with an evident effort. "And you would

have me believe now that it was told to punish me. I should like to know your real motive."

He laughed. "Come," he said, "let us be friends; you always were a little spitfire, Emily, but I don't think you could bear me malice for long, eh?"

"Tell me the truth," she said, rising as she spoke. "Why did you lie to me?" She came close to him and put a hand on either shoulder, bending down to look into his eyes. "Speak."

"Don't make a fool of yourself, my dear. We have had enough scenes for one day."

He began to see that it would not be an easy matter to pacify her. Confound that doctor! Why in the world had he left them alone?

"I am waiting for your answer."

"I tell you it was you yourself who drove me to it, with your eternal fault-finding. I have not treated you well, Emily; I acknowledge it, but we will let bygones be bygones."

"And your promise?" said she, beneath her breath. "What of your promise to make me your wife?" With a swift caressing movement she laid her head upon his arm. "Rupert, do you forget

how happy we have been together—you and I? My best I flung at your feet—all a woman has to give I gave you in blindness, faith and love.” Her slender fingers gripped him tightly, and he could feel the quick throbbing of her heart. “I trusted to your word. Must it fail me now?”

It was a terrible price to pay, but the girl was so beautiful that for a moment he wavered. Since Constance Armitage had shut her doors upon him and would have none of his love, he might do worse than reward this faithful soul who would be his willing slave to the last hour of her life.

Purely from a selfish conviction that it would be to his own advantage and from no thought of the cruel wrong he had done her, of the irreparable injury which nothing could ever blot out, nor from a desire to make amends, he gathered her closely to him. Well, since it must be, marriage with Emily Baillie would impose no great restriction upon his actions.

“I will keep my word,” he replied, and looked to see the love-light sparkle in her eye, but Emily drew herself apart, and she had grown white as a Lenten lily

“You ask me to be your wife, Lord Hardstock!”

“I say I will marry you, Emily.”

He felt that there was a very wide distinction between the phrases, although what they conveyed was the same.

“And I refuse the honour.”

“What!” Lord Hardstock really thought that she must have taken leave of her senses—the sudden joy had been too much for her—but he was speedily undeceived.

“I loved you once—but now I hate and loathe you, and despise myself that ever I yielded to you. My eyes are opened, and I know you as you are.”

“What do you mean? Are you insane?”

“No. On the contrary, I am cured—cured of the miserable folly that has made shipwreck of the best years of my life. I decline your offer, Lord Hardstock.”

With an oath he turned towards the door. At that moment he could have felled her to the earth. That she should have dared to fool him, to laugh at him, to throw his magnanimity in his teeth!

“You are not going, Lord Hardstock?” It was the doctor’s voice.

“Yes, sir, I am,” stuttered his lordship. “As a man of honour I have acted as you entreated me to do, but Miss Baillie”—he could say no more, but stumbled out into

the hall, and a moment later the door shut with a bang.

Then these two looked into one another's faces.

"Vivian," said she, softly, "you wished Lord Hardstock to make me his wife?"

"If it was your wish. Emily, why did you refuse him?"

For all answer the girl flung her hands before her face.

"I am not worthy," she murmured humbly. But it was not of Lord Hardstock she was thinking. And then the tears came, raining down her pale cheeks, and she held out her arms to him with a pathetic little cry

"Teach me to be good, help me to be good. Make me what I ought to be."

"Emily, it is not possible!"

She looked up at him, their eyes met, and the next moment she was sobbing on his bosom.

Vivian Dale had gained his heart's desire.

\* \* \* \* \*

Five long weary months had dragged themselves away. Christmas had come and gone and a New Year dawned.

Constance Armitage devoted her life to her little daughter. She had never filled

Miss Baillie's place. Eva was the sole thing left for her to love and to cling to. With some surprise she saw the notice of Dr. Dale's marriage in the *Morning Post*. She knew that he had left Kensington, but she did not know where he had gone, and felt too apathetic to enquire. What the doctor had been unwilling to yield to Janet's pleadings he gladly conceded to his wife. Emily declared that there were so many painful memories connected with the neighbourhood that she could not be happy there, and without a moment's hesitation he agreed that they should leave. This was another thorn in Janet's side. There was no open warfare between these two, but a veiled animosity which became so apparent at last to the doctor, that he told his sister in so many words that it would be better for them all if she were to make her home apart.

"I knew what it would be," cried Janet, stormily. "I was sure that your wife would never rest until she had turned me out of doors."

"You are unjust," replied her brother, "as you have always been where Emily was concerned. She has never broached the subject to me, but your manner to her is so hostile that you cannot be surprised I should resent it."

"Vivian, I sadly fear you have made a great mistake," groaned Janet, and to do her justice she did honestly believe that Emily was not the wife her brother should have chosen. And I am bound to say that a good many people would have agreed with her.

"If so," and the doctor smiled serenely, for he had no misgivings on the subject—"if so, I am sure you will have no pity for me, Janet."

"At least I am your sister," she answered, indignantly, "and have some natural affection for you, whatever you may have for me."

"We will not quarrel, but I think for the happiness of us all it would be advisable for you to choose another home."

And this is what Janet did. To her intimate friends she hinted that it had been her own proposition to leave her brother. "Married people get on better alone," said she, but she never forgave Emily, and lost no opportunity of casting a stone at her. But Emily was either too happy or too absolutely indifferent to bandy words with her.

As the months rolled by she had but one thought and aim in life—Vivian's comfort and Vivian's well-being.

It may briefly here be stated that Janet's prognostications were never verified, nor did Dr. Dale ever regret the step he had taken.



## CHAPTER XLIV.

EARLY in the new year came the welcome news that Daphne had a little son. Gerald wrote with a heart brimming over with happiness, urging that Constance should come over to Paris and judge for herself what a remarkable specimen of babyhood the heir was.

“The nurse is a perfect tyrant,” he added, “and will hardly allow me a glimpse of Daphne. She declares that I am more trouble to manage than the boy. Come and take my part.”

And Constance went. She shut up the house in Kensington and sent Eva to her aunt.

It did one good to look at Mr. Armitage's face, for it was one broad beam of satisfaction, and there was something in the young mother's eyes, as she looked up from the fluffy head on her arm, that told of rest and peace.

“Oh! It was not for nothing then.” But poor Constance sighed wistfully, for it

was at a terrible price to herself that she had purchased happiness for her brother-in-law.

Now it must not be supposed that Daphne's whole nature could change in a second of time—the process was very gradual. The wilful spirit often showed itself, and the natural obstinacy that was so essentially a part of her character would now and again come to the fore, but the terrible lesson she had had would never be forgotten, and with every year as it passed she would grow staid and more to be relied upon. And above and beyond all else the girl was slowly realising that she loved her husband, loved and honoured him, and now that the little one had come to her, there was yet another link to bind husband and wife together.

"It isn't very pretty, I am afraid," she whispered, half apologetically, as she drew the covering aside and displayed a little wrinkled, red face to Constance's gaze, "but nurse says they always look like that, so I must be contented, I suppose. He'll grow nicer by-and-by," she added, with a little reassuring smile.

"I think he is a fine little fellow, dear. I am sure you ought to be very proud of him."

Daphne made a rapid recovery, and was

soon able to leave her room, and then, just as she was beginning to think of home and England, Constance fell ill herself. Cold, she said it was, for she was feverish and her limbs ached, but she would not have a doctor.

"I shall be all right in a day or two." But a week went by and she was still ailing, and at last she took to her bed and lay there, too weak to leave it, and then Daphne took the law into her own hands and sent for a medical man. There was nothing much amiss, he said. Madame had lost strength, and wanted a tonic. He wrote a prescription and he paid a daily visit, but Constance grew no better. She must not lie there any longer, she must dress and go into the salon, she needed rousing, said Dr. Pierre, and at his bidding Constance crept from her bed, very shaky and feeling as if she had had a long illness, and lay on the sofa in Daphne's pretty drawing-room. A week went by and Constance began to mend, but she was in no state yet to travel, and Daphne wrote to Mrs. Strangways and told her that it was out of the question that Mrs. Armitage could return for another couple of weeks.

The baby throve amazingly and Daphne was the proudest, happiest little mother one could conceive.

Dr. Pierre became interested in his patient. The case puzzled him. There was nothing radically wrong with Mrs. Armitage, no organic trouble, and her temperature was normal. At the same time there was such an utter failure of energy and vitality that he was puzzled, and more anxious than he cared to acknowledge.

"Has she had any great shock, or is she fretting over anything?" he asked of Daphne, and in perfect good faith she replied that she was quite sure that there was nothing of the sort.

Daphne had been for a short drive with her husband, and came home radiant and quite excited.

"Who do you suppose I have seen?" cried she. "You would never guess, and yet he is an old friend of yours. Mr. St. Quentin. He is looking old and ill. I leaned forward to try and catch his eye, but he did not see me."

Constance was silent. Her heart was throbbing so fast she felt suffocated, but she gave no outward sign.

"I must go back to London," she told herself that same night. "It is not safe for me to stop here any longer. I think it would kill me to see him now"

Two days later, as Daphne stepped from

her carriage at the door of the Magasin du Louvre, a gentleman drew back to let her pass. Daphne looked up, and the next instant had stretched out her hand gleefully.

"Mr. St. Quentin! Then it *was* you. I knew it was, although Gerald would have it that I was mistaken. When did you come back, and why did you ever go away?"

He smiled. The new Daphne was very like the old impulsive Daphne still.

"You are alone?" glancing at the empty carriage.

"Yes. Oh, Mr. St. Quentin, I should like to tell you, only it would take too long. Come and see us. Constance is staying with me. She——"

"Lady Hardstock?"

Daphne looked perplexed. "No," she said simply. "Constance is Mrs. Armitage still. I do not think she will ever marry."

"She is not his wife?" he asked, in so much agitation that she could not but notice it. "Surely she must be."

"Why?" There was a mystery here, and the little lady was bent on getting to the bottom of it.

"I was told—there was a rumour—that she—had left her home with him."

The words had a hideous sound. Daphne caught her breath sharply. "Who could have said such an iniquitous thing?"

Lord Hardstock did, it is true, come with her as far as Dover—I remember now that she said so—but I can prove that he went no further, for it was I who summoned her, Mr. St. Quentin. It was to me she hurried, I was in terrible trouble—I can never explain how or why, but I had been guilty of a grave error, and but for Constance I might have made shipwreck of my life.”

“Is this true?”

“Every word of it. Mr. St. Quentin, I can’t stand here talking. I am not very strong,” she blushed, brightly. “If you will come and see us I will show you the most wonderful baby you ever saw, all my own. I wasn’t a bit fond of him at first, but I am now. I think he is beautiful. Will you come?”

St. Quentin declared that nothing would give him so much pleasure as to renew his acquaintance with his old friends, and a minute later Daphne had disappeared in the Magasin, and he was left on the pavement looking after her.

Then he wheeled round and bent his steps in the direction of the Armitages’ What a hurry he was in to see that wonderful baby, to be sure! He laughed softly to himself. He was at once admitted. Madame Armitage was in the salon.

He pushed aside the portière and went

in. In a big easy chair which almost swallowed her up, so fragile and thin was she now, sat Constance, her hands folded idly in her lap.

She was wearing a loose white tea-gown, which made her look still more delicate and ethereal, and her soft hair was gathered in a big knot in the nape of her neck. All this he had time to note, for she made no movement, her head thrown back against the dark cushions and the blue veined eyelids drooping heavily.

“Constance!”

He crossed the room quickly to her side. She did not faint nor scream, nor utter so much as a sound—you see she has never been an emotional heroine in any way, poor Constance; but she raised herself slightly and grasped either arm of the big chair, while her breath came quick and fast, and her white cheek grew whiter still.

“Constance, you will be my wife—you will not send me away from you again?”

She lifted her head—pride forgotten, the wrong he had done her forgiven, every barrier swept away by the weight of her exceeding love.

They stood heart to heart and soul to soul. And he took his answer from her lips.

THE END.









# ASPINAL'S ENAMEL



